How Atrial Fibrillation May Affect Your Trip to the Dentist

by SHARON BOYD

AFib at the Dentist

Although a lot of people don’t find it important to keep their dentist updated on their health changes, it’s more serious than you think. This is especially true if you live with cardiovascular conditions such as atrial fibrillation. Every dental office should conduct a brief health history update at each appointment. Let them know which cardiologist you are under the care of, the time of your last visit, and any recent complications. Now, let's take a look at atrial fibrillation and dental care, and the connection.

If You Have a Pacemaker

Some types of equipment used regularly in the dental office may interfere with certain types of pacemakers. Older pacemakers were a contraindication for using electronic scalers (ultrasonic scalers) during cleaning appointments. If possible, let your dentist know what type of pacemaker you have. Ultrasonic scalers are used in most dental cleanings, so it’s an important detail to note.

Schedule Cleanings on a Regular Basis

Although the final verdict is out, some research suggests periodontal (gum) disease may be linked to cardiac dysrhythmia. Periodontal disease is already shown to increase the likelihood of other cardiovascular disease conditions. Removing disease-causing bacteria from the gum pockets around the teeth can reduce systemic inflammation as well as the number of bacteria in the cardiovascular system. In turn, this could decrease fibrillation. It’s recommended that you see your dentist twice a year for preventive cleanings.

Practicing good oral hygiene daily will reduce the overall amount of bacteria in your mouth. Investing in an electronic toothbrush and water flosser is a great option, especially if you have difficulty accessing some areas of your mouth.

Update Your List of Medications

Anticoagulants taken for Afib can increase bleeding. This is only a concern if your dentist needs to move forward with oral surgery such as an extraction. If you are taking an anticoagulant, your dentist will consult your cardiologist about any procedures that are needed.

Your Dentist May Need to Alter Some Procedures

Occasionally some patients may need to be pre-medicated with an antibiotic before having certain types of procedures done. Another significant consideration is what type of local anesthetic can be used by your dentist. Most local anesthetics contain epinephrine to function as a vasoconstrictor. The amount of medication and type of injection being given will be affected by this factor. If possible, your dentist will need to use a local anesthetic that

does not contain epinephrine.

It’s best not to put off your dental care. A healthy mouth is a great way to improve your overall health and reduce the burden on your immune system caused by inflammation. Letting your oral health get out of hand can complicate other health factors as well as add up to costly dental bills. A comprehensive preventive plan in which you are cared for under a dentist that works hand in hand with your cardiologist is one of the best things someone living with Afib can do for their smile.