Oral Care for Alzheimer’s Sufferers

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Remember Your Teeth

If you or your loved one is living with Alzheimer's disease, it can contribute to oral health problems later on down the road when the disease is more progressed. By taking action during the initial onset of the disease, some oral complications can be avoided and overall quality of life can be improved. Now, let's take a look at oral care for Alzheimer’s.

A Link between Dementia and Gum Disease

More recent studies have shown that P. gingivalis, an oral bacteria associated with periodontal disease (gum disease) was found in the brains of patients who had AD. This bacterium enters the brain through the bloodstream of people with active gum disease. The relationship between AD and gum disease is thought to be that this bacteria enters into the brain, where the immune system then targets the bacteria to destroy them. As a result, chemical secretion in the brain also destroys neurons, thereby deteriorating memory. These findings suggest that patients could have accelerated AD if gum disease is not prevented or treated.

Denture Wearers

Patients with AD who wear dentures may experience complications such as decreased appetite, sore spots, or pain if their dentures are not cared for or do not fit properly. Dentures should be removed every night to soak in a denture cleanser and brushed thoroughly before being placed back into the mouth. The mouth should also be cleaned with a soft brush or washcloth. Always check for sores and see the dentist regularly to manage the fit of the prosthesis. It may not be possible for people to communicate that they are experiencing pain, thus not wanting to eat. Never wear dentures overnight, as prolonged wear can lead to oral infections and decreased bone levels.

Decline in Oral Health

The inability to care for oneself can allow gum disease to progress rapidly, as well as result in increased tooth decay and dental-related pain. Treating dental needs at the onset of the disease can prevent painful or costly complications from occurring later on. Investing in oral hygiene aids such as an electric toothbrush will also increase the amount of bacteria removed daily. Scheduling preventive cleanings every 6 months can help prevent the onset or progression of periodontal disease.

Assistance with Oral Hygiene by Caregivers

There comes a point where loved ones and caregivers need to step in to help AD sufferers with their oral hygiene habits. As AD progresses, the inability to self-care often causes most people to wonder when it’s appropriate to step in and help. Your dentist or hygienist can assess the oral hygiene and bacterial levels during cleaning appointments, and let you know if it’s time to have someone begin helping the patient. A hands-on approach with

short instructions is often needed. Tell your loved one to hold the brush, put toothpaste on the brush, put the brush in their mouth and so on. If needed, help them hold the brush and move the brush around for or with them.