



Anti-Depressants on the Rise

Paxil, Prozac and Zoloft are common anti-depressants taken by over 40 million Americans daily to combat the effects of depression, anxiety, phobias and even PMS. In the past two months, since the WTC attacks on September 11th and current events thereafter, the number of prescriptions for these drugs have skyrocketed. Worldwide, more and more people are turning to these would-be miracle pills, in hopes to relieve added stress and anxiety and give them a sense of security in otherwise uncertain times. But buyer beware: before you pop one of these pills, you may want to read the fine lines on the box. With any medication, one should expect to find common side effects, and anti-depressants may have more than a mouthful!

According to recent findings of the International Association of Dental Research in France, people who take psychiatric or anti-anxiety medications commonly experience a reduced ability to produce saliva (causing dry mouth), in turn creating problems for the mouth, teeth, and gums. With dry mouth, healthy lubrication is greatly reduced. Effects may range from mild discomfort, difficulty chewing and swallowing, bad breath or halitosis and reduced taste sensitivity. In more severe cases, dentists have seen an increase in cavities and infections of the mouth and cracked, bleeding lips.

Dr. Elisa Mello, a Manhattan based cosmetic dentist explains, "Those taking anti-depressant medications show a rate of dental decay almost four times higher than normal. Because gum disease and tooth decay contribute to tooth loss and other serious repercussions, it is important to tell your dentist if you are taking any of these medications."

According to Dr. Mello, if you must take anti-depressants, there are certain key things that can be done to help relieve the symptoms of dry mouth and avoid tooth decay. The following are tips to insure a healthy mouth and bright smile while taking these medications:

- Take sips of water (or suck ice chips) throughout the day. This is more helpful than drinking large amounts, though you should get 8 to 10 glasses of fluid intake per day.
- Drink frequently while eating. This makes chewing and swallowing easier and may increase the taste of foods.
- Avoid spicy, salty or highly acidic foods or other irritants, such as caffeine, alcohol and tobacco,
- Brush your teeth at least twice a day (more, if possible) with a soft brush, and floss daily to remove plaque, which builds up more quickly with dry mouth. Since dry mouth increases the risk of cavities, checkups two to three times a year are advised.
- Avoid sticky, sugary foods, candies or gums, or brush shortly after. However, sugarless gum can actually help since chewing helps produce saliva. You can get a similar effect and provide extra lubrication with sugarless (especially sour) candies.
- Keep a glass of water (or a spray bottle) within reach to combat dryness during the night or upon awakening.
- Avoid commercial mouthwashes: These rinses contain flavoring and alcohol which not only dry your mouth further, but they also increase the rate of decay producing bacteria in the mouth. Your dentist can prescribe special mouthwashes that will help lubricate and soothe dry tissues.