



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Delta Dental of Illinois
111 Shuman Boulevard
Naperville, Illinois 60563

Contact:
Liz Jans
The Meyocks Group
515-238-4304
lizjans@meyocks.com

September is Healthy Aging Month

Delta Dental of Illinois cautions that medications may cause dry mouth, harm oral health

NAPERVILLE, Ill. (September 13, 2013) – During National Healthy Aging Month in September, Delta Dental of Illinois cautions older adults to guard against a dangerous side effect of more than 400 prescribed and over-the-counter medications – dry mouth.¹

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that about four out of every five older adults suffer from a chronic condition, and half have at least two.² Oftentimes, those chronic conditions are treated with a variety of prescription medications that could lead to dry mouth.

Dry mouth occurs when salivary glands are unable to produce enough saliva. But it's more than just irritating and mildly uncomfortable; dry mouth can also increase the risk of tooth decay, gum disease and other oral infections. Many medications that treat chronic illnesses – such as hay fever, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, high blood pressure and depression – are known to have dry mouth as a side effect.³

“As our population ages, there are more people with chronic medical conditions taking multiple prescription medications,” said Dr. Katina Spadoni, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois. “It's important to remember that many of these may cause dry mouth and increase the risk for tooth decay and other oral problems. Regular dental visits can help older adults with early detection of problems and the appropriate guidance.”

The New York Times recently attributed the dry mouth that results from many prescription medications as a major contributor to the rapidly deteriorating oral health of nursing home residents.⁴ The American Dental Association (ADA) has even advocated for warning-label information on these types of medications to promote awareness of the potential oral health complications associated with medication-induced dry mouth.³ According to the ADA, chronic dry mouth is a common adverse effect for each of the following medication groups:³

- Cardiovascular medications (e.g., diuretics or calcium channel blockers)
- Anticholinergic agents for treatment of urinary incontinence (e.g., oxybutynin and tolterodine)
- Tricyclic antidepressants (e.g., amitriptyline)
- Anti-psychotic agents (e.g., chlorpromazine)
- Anti-Parkinson's medications (e.g., benztropine)
- Anti-allergy medications (e.g., antihistamines)

If your mouth becomes dry after taking a medication, you may want to mention it to your physician. Sometimes, an equally effective substitute medication can be prescribed that does not have the same side effect. To help you maintain good oral health and stimulate saliva, your dentist might suggest sipping water or sucking on ice chips frequently, avoiding alcohol, caffeine and tobacco products, chewing sugar-free gum or sucking on sugar-free candies.⁵

About Delta Dental of Illinois

Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL) is a not-for-profit dental service corporation that provides dental benefit programs to individuals and more than 5,000 employee groups throughout Illinois. DDIL covers 2 million individuals, employees and family members in these groups nationwide. DDIL is based in Naperville, Illinois and offers single-site administration and client services.

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Healthy Aging at a Glance (2011)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/aging.htm>

³ *Warning Label Information on Medications Associated with Xerostomia (Dry Mouth)*. American Dental Association. http://www.ada.org/sections/newsAndEvents/pdfs/ltr_dry_mouth_110427.pdf

⁴ *Nursing Homes' Dental Problems*. *New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/video/2013/08/05/health/100000002374631/nursing-homes-dental-problems.html?smid=tw-share>

⁵ "Dry Mouth." *National Institute on Aging, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health*, March 20, 2010. <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/DryMouth Accessed 2010>.