



# Medications with Oral Side Effects

**This Grandparent's Day, learn more about how meds can affect oral health.**

## Six Most Common Oral Side Effects

There is nothing more special than being able to experience the love of grandparents. The stories of their life experiences provide great first-hand history lessons and their hugs ensure everything will be okay. While grandparents are super heroes with lifesaving advice, they tend to be more susceptible to health conditions that require medications. Whether prescribed or over-the-counter, many medications have side effects that can affect oral health.

Be mindful of the following common mouth-related side-effects that can occur in the elderly due to medications:

- A **strange taste** in the mouth can be the result of losing some of the ability to taste, sinus infections, or medications. Common medications that can cause a metallic taste or alter taste in the mouth are:
  - Clarithromycin (antibiotic)
  - Nicotine skin patches (smoking cessation)
  - Metformin (diabetes)
  - ACE inhibitors (blood pressure)
- **Gingiva Overgrowth** is when the gum is inflamed or enlarged. This can be caused by poor oral hygiene or medication. Gingiva overgrowth can often be managed by brushing and flossing daily, however common medications that cause gingiva overgrowth are:
  - Cyclosporine (immune suppressants)
  - Dilantin/Phenytoin (anti-seizure)
  - Amlodipine/Norvasc (calcium channel blockers)
- **Dry mouth** happens when salivation is reduced and increases the risk of cavities and gum disease. Dry mouth can be managed by avoiding caffeine, or sipping water. Common medications that cause dry mouth are:
  - Hydrocodone & Oxycodone (opioid pain medications)
  - Zolof & Elavil (anti-depressants)
  - Claritin, Allegra, Zyrtec (allergy medications)
  - Bumetanide & Furosemide (diuretics)
  - Tizanidine & Baclofen (muscle relaxants)



## What About Sugary Medications?

Sugar is found in certain medications such as cough drops, antacid tablets, antifungal agents, chewable vitamins and tablets. Too much sugar can lead to cavities. The following methods can be used to intake sugary medications to avoid cavities:

- Take the medicine in a tablet form
- Take the medicine at meal time
- Brush your teeth after taking the medicine with a fluoride toothpaste

And, of course, regular dental visits to have your teeth professionally cleaned and examined.

- **Hairy tongue** happens when the balanced environment of natural bacteria living in the mouth is out of balance. Common causes include poor hygiene, dehydration, smoking, and medications. Hairy tongue can be managed by maintaining a good oral hygiene and staying hydrated. Common medications that can result in hairy tongue are:
  - Penicillin, erythromycin, tetracycline, doxycycline (antibiotics)
- **Oral thrush** (yeast infection in the mouth) can be triggered by illness, smoking, dentures, or medications. Common medications that cause oral thrush are:
  - Advair, Flovent (Asthma)
  - Antibiotics
- **Oral Ulcers** are painful sores inside the mouth. They generally go away within two weeks on their own. However, there may be underlying issues such as sexually transmitted diseases that may cause them to return. Be sure to visit the dentist and communicate about recurring oral ulcers. Common medications that result in oral ulcers:
  - Amoxicillin & Ampicillin (antibiotics)
  - Phenytoin & phenobarbital (anti-seizure)
  - Methotrexate (Immunosuppressant)
  - Ibuprofen, aspirin (pain reliever)

Overlooking oral side effects of medication can lead to long-term health issues and should be discussed with your doctor and/or dentist.

## Managing the Side-Effects

Not all side effects can be avoided, as each person's body responds differently to medications. While we can't avoid side-effects all together, we can reduce some of the oral side effects of medications:

- Manage dry mouth by staying hydrated, suck on sugarless candy to promote saliva production, and use a humidifier at night.
- Reduce gingiva enlargement by taking extra care of the mouth when teeth brushing: use a soft-bristled toothbrush and gentle brushing motion; continue to floss regularly and see your dentist twice a year for cleanings.
- Discuss with your doctor about changing the medication or alternative options if a medicine alters your taste.
- If you observe thrush or sores in the mouth, call the doctor immediately. A prescription may be provided to treat the condition.

It is easy to assume our grandparents are healthy and thriving if we don't visit them consistently or live far away, but it is important to check in on them occasionally to provide support where it is needed. Whether it means assisting with basic house chores, picking up groceries, administering medication, keeping an eye out for new symptoms, or simply returning a hug and telling them we love them.

Happy Grandparent's Day!



For more oral health information, please visit our website at [www.bcbsfedental.com](http://www.bcbsfedental.com).



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