

THE CURRENT SITUATION

We live in a fast-paced, high-pressure world, where stress is a common concern. Canadians are constantly connected, and daily environmental, financial, and emotional stressors are unavoidable.

STRESS IS DEFINED AS THE FEELING OF EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL TENSION AND IT CAN BE TRIGGERED BY MANY SITUATIONS AND EVENTS.

IT'S YOUR BODY'S REACTION TO CHALLENGES, DEMANDS, AND PRESSURES.

While stress is a natural occurrence, excessive stress is a contributor to a host of mental and physical health problems, including oral health issues.

Everyone reacts differently to stressors, but for some, it can be overwhelming, and can lead to unhealthy habits, including poor oral hygiene and poor oral health habits with adverse effects.

Although stress can't be eliminated, there are things we can do to manage our stress and lessen the effects it has on our oral health.

THE LINK BETWEEN STRESS AND ORAL HEALTH

When we experience stress, we don't often think about how it's affecting our oral health and our habits. In times of excessive stress, dental care can be neglected, with individuals forgetting to brush or floss, and not visiting the dentist regularly. Other common effects of stress on oral health include:



DRY MOUTH

Often caused by medications used to manage stress-related conditions. Without enough saliva, there is a greater risk of tooth decay, gum disease, and infection.



TEETH CLENCHING AND GRINDING

A very common reaction to stress, teeth clenching and grinding can lead to headaches and migraines, fractures of teeth and fillings, joint and muscle pain, receding gums, tooth sensitivities, loosening of teeth, and even complete tooth loss.



CANKER AND COLD SORES

Stress puts our immune system under pressure, which can lead to breakouts of oral sores because our resistance isn't as strong. Canker sores can be very painful, but are harmless, while cold sores are an expression of the usually dormant herpes simplex virus.

In stressful situations, some individuals will rely on unhealthy habits to cope such as smoking, alcohol consumption, cannabis use, and sugary foods and drinks. These habits can have adverse effects on oral health with links to gum disease, oral cancers, and tooth decay.

FACTS + STATS



ACCORDING TO STATISTICS CANADA **73%** OF ALL WORKING ADULTS AGES **20-64** REPORT AT LEAST SOME AMOUNT OF STRESS.



CORPORATE RESEARCH ASSOCIATES' AUTUMN 2018 ATLANTIC QUARTERLY SURVEY FOUND: **85%** OF NOVA SCOTIANS SURVEYED AGREE THAT ONE'S MENTAL HEALTH AFFECTS ONE'S ORAL HEALTH.

IN THE SAME SURVEY, NOVA SCOTIANS REPORTED THAT IN THE PAST 5-10 YEARS, THEY MOST COMMONLY EXPERIENCED:



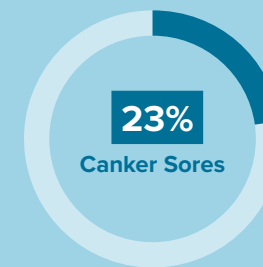
37%
Teeth Grinding
and/or
Clenching



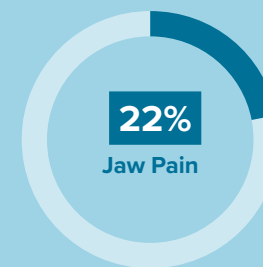
29%
Tooth Decay



25%
Dry Mouth



23%
Canker Sores



22%
Jaw Pain



20%
Cold Sores

Corporate Research Associates, Inc., Autumn 2018 Atlantic Quarterly® Survey (NSDA Commissioned Questions), November 2018.

TIPS

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF STRESS ON YOUR ORAL HEALTH:



BE AWARE OF CLENCHING OR GRINDING

Talk to your dentist if you think you're grinding or clenching your teeth while you're awake or asleep (your dentist may suggest a night guard).



HELP WITH DRY MOUTH

Try chewing sugarless gum and drink plenty of water to help with dry mouth. Your dentist can help you find ways to manage your symptoms.



DENTAL HYGIENE ROUTINE

Keep up good dental hygiene habits (make time to brush 2X a day and floss, and keep regular dental appointments to lessen your risk of tooth decay and gum disease).

WAYS TO HELP MANAGE STRESS:



RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Look for ways to de-stress and relax (stay active, get enough sleep, do activities you enjoy, practice mindfulness, relaxation, and breathing exercises).



LEARN COPING MECHANISMS

Learn what coping methods work best for you (improve your problem-solving skills, talk to a loved one, simplify your life, learn helpful thinking strategies).



HEALTHY DIET

Eat a healthy diet low in sugar and restrict caffeine and alcohol (be aware of frequency and reliance).



DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

You can also connect with your local Canadian Mental Health Association for stress reduction and prevention tools and resources—CMHA NS Division, 902-466-6600 or 1-877-466-6606.

TALK TO YOUR DENTIST

Your dentist is a valuable resource, make sure you're sharing your oral health concerns and questions.



SHARE YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY

Your dentist can discuss if this may be impacting your oral health and recommend specific treatments.



STEPS FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

As a province, we can always do more to improve the mental well-being and oral health of Nova Scotians:



INVEST MORE IN PREVENTION

Awareness and education can help address potential mental health and oral health problems before they become more serious and lessen the burden placed on emergency services.



IMPROVE ACCESS

Many individuals rely on private insurance to access mental health services and dental care, leaving vulnerable groups at a disadvantage. Publicly-funded programs need to be better communicated so Nova Scotians know what's covered and when.



INCREASE COLLABORATION

The dental team, mental health service providers, other health care providers, and patients need to work together to determine the best course of action to achieve optimal overall health.

2019

NOVA SCOTIA ORAL HEALTH REPORT

STRESS AND ORAL HEALTH



REFERENCES

- Canadian Dental Association www.cda-adc.ca
- Canadian Mental Health Association <http://novascotia.cmha.ca>
- British Columbia Dental Association www.yourdentalhealth.ca
- Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca>
- Oral Health Foundation <https://www.dentalhealth.org>
- Ontario Dental Association <https://www.youroralhealth.ca/>