

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) and Oral Health

What is high blood pressure (hypertension)?

High Blood Pressure, often called hypertension, occurs when blood moving through your arteries places too much force against the artery walls. A normal blood pressure reading is less than or equal to 120/80 (read "120 over 80"). High blood pressure is important to manage, as consistently high blood pressure may cause damage to your heart, kidneys, or brain.

Where can I learn more about high blood pressure?

1. Short handout: *What is High Blood Pressure?* Access at <https://tinyurl.com/sm7x2w>
2. Patient Education resources Michigan Medicine clinicians recommend: <https://michmed.org/AO06J>

The above resources will provide more information on the medical management of high blood pressure. This handout will specifically discuss how high blood pressure may impact your oral health, including medication side effects and considerations during dental treatment.

How may my blood pressure medications impact my mouth?

A serious side effect of some high blood pressure medications includes:

- Swelling of the lips, known as “angioedema.” If you are on a blood pressure medication and develop swollen lips, **contact your doctor immediately**. This may indicate you are allergic to the medication and need to avoid taking it. Your doctor may provide you with a different medication to help you control your blood pressure.

Less severe, but more common side effects include:

- Dry mouth - Dry mouth may lead to an increased risk for tooth decay and infections in your mouth. To reduce this risk, please keep your mouth as clean as possible and brush with fluoride toothpaste for 2 minutes at least twice per day. Additional information on dry mouth and dry mouth management is available in the handout “Dry Mouth Management” <https://michmed.org/ZbGJv>
- Changes in taste including loss of taste or metal taste in the mouth.
- Oral lesions including “lichenoid reactions.” “Lichenoid reactions” may look like a condition known as Lichen Planus. Lichen-“oid” actually means “like” Lichen Planus. However, unlike Lichen Planus, lichenoid lesions caused by medications may go away when the medication is stopped.
- Gingival overgrowth, or thickening of your gums. Keeping excellent oral hygiene may reduce this risk.

How do I reduce my risk of oral health problems and keep my mouth healthy?

1. A healthy diet and daily movement are great for blood pressure control and oral health!
 - a. Eat a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Avoid high salt or sugary foods and beverages which may make blood pressure more difficult to control and increase your risk for dental cavities.
 - b. Get daily movement and intentional exercise several times per week.
 - c. Work with your doctor to make sure your blood pressure medications are working for you.
2. Keep your mouth clean
 - a. Brush your teeth with a soft-bristled toothbrush for two minutes at

- least twice per day.
- b. Floss at least once per day. Flossing daily helps to reduce the amount of bacteria that love to hide between your teeth where the toothbrush cannot reach. This bacteria may lead to inflammation and a higher risk for gum disease as well as cavities between your teeth.
 - c. Brush your tongue with your toothbrush or tongue scraper 1-2 times per day. Bacteria love to live on the tongue which may cause bad breath, poor taste, a coating on your tongue, and an increased risk for infections.
3. See your dentist regularly. You may need to see your dentist and have a cleaning more than twice per year. By investing more to prevent problems and keeping your mouth healthy, you will save a lot more in the long run!
 4. Let your dentist know if any concerns in your mouth arise **as soon as possible!**

How should I prepare for a dental appointment?

1. Make sure to take blood pressure medications as usual.
2. Tell your dentist if you have any changes in your medications or new symptoms.
3. Try to arrive at your appointment early so that you have time to relax.

How will my blood pressure be monitored during my appointment?

1. The dental team will take your blood pressure at the beginning of your appointment, prior to dental treatment.
2. Depending on the type of dental treatment, your dental team may take your blood pressure several times during treatment. This is usually during surgical treatments.

3. Your dental team may take your blood pressure after treatment is over. This is because dental treatment may cause your blood pressure to increase, and the dental team will want to make sure that you are safe to go home.

What happens if my blood pressure is high during my appointment?

1. If the top number of your blood pressure is above 180 *or* the bottom number is above 110 (written 180/110), you are at **serious risk** for problems including a heart attack or stroke. Your dentist will refer you to medical support **immediately** and will not complete any elective dental treatment. This is for your safety.
2. If the top number of your blood pressure is between 160-180 *or* the bottom number is between 100-110, your dentist may recommend you follow-up with your medical provider. Depending on the type of dental treatment needed, you may need to reschedule when your blood pressure is better controlled.
3. If the top number of your blood pressure is between 140-159 *or* the bottom number is between 90-99, your dentist will likely inform you that your blood pressure is elevated and recommend working with your medical provider to improve control. Dental treatment may proceed as scheduled.

What should I do after dental treatment?

1. Following routine dental care, no changes are necessary.
2. If you had surgery, high blood pressure may increase your risk for bleeding. If you develop bleeding, lightly wet a gauze and apply pressure to the bleeding site. Hold until bleeding stops. Avoid removing and replacing gauze too often as this may promote bleeding. Contact your dental team if the bleeding does not stop with gauze pressure.
3. If you are in pain, make sure to take pain medications as recommended by

your dentist. Uncontrolled pain may raise your blood pressure.

4. If you develop symptoms such as a headache, chest pain, or shortness of breath, seek medical attention immediately.

Who should I call if I have questions?

- Call Hospital Dentistry at (734) 936-5950, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
- After hours and on weekends, call Hospital Paging at (734) 936-6267 and ask for the dentistry resident on call if your question or concern is urgent.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Jillian Rigert, DMD, MD
Reviewer: Stephanie Munz, DDS
Plain Language Editor: Ruti Volk, MSI, AHIP

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 2/22/2021