

# DENTAL CARE IN SCLERODERMA



**SCLERODERMA  
FOUNDATION**

SUPPORT • EDUCATION • RESEARCH

People living with scleroderma face unique challenges while trying to maintain their oral health. They are more likely to be affected by dental conditions such as small mouth, dry mouth, jaw pain, gum disease, and dietary issues. Many people living with scleroderma have hand involvement, making it difficult to brush and floss. Please speak with your dentist about adaptive devices and tools that can help. More frequent check-ups are important for people who have scleroderma.

For more thorough information on Oral Health and Scleroderma, please visit [www.scleroderma.org](http://www.scleroderma.org) and search for Oral Health.

## HOW CAN MY DENTIST, MY RHEUMATOLOGIST AND I WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE MY ORAL HEALTH?

Dentists know a lot about oral health, medications, and systemic health. However, just like primary care physicians, dentists do not know as much about scleroderma as your rheumatologist. Here are a list of scleroderma related oral health issues about which you may ask your dentist.

### **Microstomia (small mouth) and Tightness of the Mucosa (the lining of the mouth)**

#### *Problems:*

- Hard for patients and professionals to clean teeth.
- The tight mucosa pulls the gingival (gums) away from the teeth.
- Hard or impossible to draw lips together to kiss.
- Limitation to tongue movement.

#### *Treatments:*

- Exercises and devices to improve the flexibility of the lips and jaw muscles.
- Periodontal (gum) surgery to improve mobility of the tongue and cheeks.

### **Xerostomia (dry mouth)**

#### *Problem:*

- Uncomfortable
- Hard to swallow food
- Increased incidence of fungal infections
- Increased risk of tooth decay & gum disease
- Less taste sensation

#### *Treatments:*

- Thorough brushing and flossing
- Drink plenty of water
- Sugar free hard candies

- Artificial saliva
- Medication to increase production of saliva (cevimeline and pilocarpine) prescribed by your dentist or physician.
- Prescription fluoride toothpaste.
- Calcium paste for night time use.

### **Gastro-esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD or acid reflux)**

#### *Problems:*

- Chest and throat pain
- Dramatic increase in tooth decay and erosion
- Esophageal lesions that may lead to cancer

#### *Treatment:*

- Diet: limit alcohol, spicy and acidic foods
- Acid reducing and antacid medication
- No smoking

### **Myofacial (muscular) Pain and Temporomandibular (jaw joint or TMJ) Pain**

#### *Problems:*

- Pain which may be confused with toothache
- Affects ability to chew

#### *Treatments:*

- Medications – muscle relaxants and anti-inflammatory
- Exercises and massage
- Dental appliances

### **Loosening of the Teeth – may be due to Scleroderma**

#### *Problems:*

- Discomfort - teeth feel loose

#### *Treatment:*

- No treatment necessary when due to scleroderma
- Traditional treatment for periodontal disease which may include surgery and extraction

### **Dysgeusia (change in taste sensation) – Medications and dry mouth can cause taste changes**

#### *Problems:*

- Reduction in quality of life
- May cause loss of appetite and weight

#### *Treatment:*

- Change medications if possible
- Treat xerostomia when appropriate

### **Sclerodactyly (tightening of the skin on the fingers)**

#### *Problem:*

- Difficult to use hands and fingers to clean teeth

### *Treatment:*

- The dentist and dental hygienist works with the patient to develop accommodations for brushing and flossing
- More frequent professional care
- Assistance from a helper

## **Depression**

### *Problems:*

- Hard to perform activities of daily living and make dental appointments
- Many anti-depression medications have oral health side effects

### *Treatment:*

- Seek mental health counseling
- Discuss this issue with your dentist and your medical doctor
- Adjust medications when there is a side effect
- Avoid the spiral of depression – depression causes worse oral health and poor oral health worsens depression.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR DENTAL APPOINTMENTS:**

- Tell the dentist you have scleroderma
- Schedule short exam and care appointments for one area at a time or one tooth at a time
- Schedule appointments for the best time of day for you
- Do your physical therapy right before
- Wear gloves and bring a blanket in case the office is cold
- Carry a list of prescription and over the counter medications, purpose, dosage, and prescribers and prescribers' contact information

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR DENTIST:**

- Mouth prop.
- Rubber dam.
- Patience of both parties.
- Short appointments and/or breaks.
- Be creative.

## **FLUORIDE**

Today, most people drink fluoridated water and brush with fluoride toothpaste. Dentists may prescribe or recommend additional fluoride for those with scleroderma.

Topical fluoride strengthens teeth by replacing calcium on the surface of teeth. There are fluoride

rinses available and prescription strength fluoride gels and toothpastes that make teeth even more resistant to decay. Regular professional applications of fluoride varnish are a relatively convenient and inexpensive way to ensure better dental health. Ask your dentist whether or not a prescription fluoride regimen is appropriate for you.

## PROFESSIONAL CARE

Living with scleroderma can be overwhelming. Even so, it is very important to maintain oral health and to minimize oral health care problems.

Not all dentists are familiar with scleroderma. Search for a dentist who will meet your needs by asking your medical doctor, calling the state or local dental society, calling the local chapter of the Scleroderma Foundation, and asking others who live with scleroderma for the name of their dentist.

If you have a dentist who knows little about scleroderma, refer them to the Scleroderma Foundation at [www.scleroderma.org](http://www.scleroderma.org) for information.

Working cooperatively with your dental care professionals and, if necessary, having your dentist speak with your physician about your overall condition as it relates to your oral health, will help to ensure that your dental care will be the best possible for your unique situation.

Please note that this brochure is provided for educational purposes only. It is not intended to substitute for informed medical advice.

*The Scleroderma Foundation thanks David M. Leader, DMD, MPH, of the Department of Comprehensive Care of Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, for his assistance in the preparation of this brochure.*

# BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SCLERODERMA FOUNDATION

When you become a member of the Scleroderma Foundation, you support the organization's mission of support, education and research. Your donation helps pay for programs in each of those three areas, including:



- Funding an average of \$1 million in original research grants awarded to investigators annually.
- Helping patients and their families cope with scleroderma through mutual support groups, physician referrals and the National Patient Education Conference.
- Promoting public education of the disease through publications, seminars, patient education events and publicity campaigns.

## **As a member of the Scleroderma Foundation, you will receive:**

- Our quarterly magazine, the “Scleroderma VOICE.” The magazine includes updates on the latest scleroderma research and treatments, positive and uplifting stories from patients living with the disease; and tips about how to manage living with scleroderma.
- Information and educational offerings from your local chapter.
- Discounted registration fees to the annual National Patient Education Conference.

**Please consider joining the Scleroderma Foundation today. A membership form is attached on the reverse side of this panel.**

**To become a member of the Scleroderma Foundation, fill out this form, tear at perforation and send with your check or credit card information to:**

Scleroderma Foundation  
Attn: Donations  
300 Rosewood Drive, Suite 105  
Danvers, MA 01923

I would like to become a member and help support the Scleroderma Foundation's efforts to improve the lives of those with scleroderma, and to assist in the search for a cause and cure. Enclosed please find my check (or credit card information) in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

**Donations of \$25 or more can be acknowledged as members (\$35 or more for international members).**

- I am not interested in member benefits.
- However, I would like to make a contribution in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Credit Card No.: \_\_\_\_\_

(Circle One:     )

Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

# OUR THREE-FOLD MISSION IS SUPPORT, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

**Support:** To help patients and their families cope with scleroderma through mutual support programs, peer counseling, physician referrals, and educational information.

**Education:** To promote public awareness and education through patient and health professional seminars, literature, and publicity campaigns.

**Research:** To stimulate and support research to improve treatment and ultimately find the cause of and cure for scleroderma and related diseases.



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