



# Dental Care

*Your questions answered*



Including:

Looking after your teeth

Your dentist and ME/CFS

Dental problems and treatments

SEPTEMBER  
2025



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#### DISCLAIMER

We recommend that the medical information in this leaflet is discussed with your doctor. It is not intended to be a substitute for personalised medical advice or treatment. You should consult your doctor whenever a new symptom arises, or an existing symptom worsens. It is important to obtain medical advice that considers other causes and possible treatments. Do not assume that new or worsened symptoms are solely because of ME/CFS or Long Covid.



## DENTAL CARE

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## LOOKING AFTER YOUR TEETH



*Visit your dentist at the frequency you are advised.*

*Brush your teeth twice a day using fluoride toothpaste.*

*Use dental floss/tape or inter-dental brushes.*

*Reduce exposure to food and drinks containing sugar.*

### **What is the best way to look after my teeth?**

You should visit your dentist at the frequency you are advised; brush your teeth twice a day using fluoride toothpaste; use dental floss/tape or inter-dental brushes once or twice a day. Reduce your exposure to food and drinks containing sugar to three or four times a day.

### **When and how should I clean my teeth?**

You should brush last thing at night and one other time – usually first thing in the morning. This should be with a manual brush with a small head and rounded end filaments, a compact angled arrangement of long and short filaments and a comfortable handle, or a powered toothbrush with an oscillating/rotating head.

It should take about two minutes to brush your teeth and you are advised to spit out excess toothpaste rather than rinse.

### **What kind of toothpaste should I use?**

Consider using toothpaste with triclosan and co-polymer or zinc citrate. This will keep the plaque levels down. Also, think about using a higher fluoride concentration (5000ppm), if prescribed by your dentist. This would be appropriate if you have a high decay rate/risk, which he/she will be able to assess.

### **I understand that a few people have concerns about the safety of fluoride in toothpaste, mouthwashes and drinking water.**

Recent reviews of the evidence, however, show no links between fluoride in water and the incidence of bone fractures or cancer.

### **Sometimes I feel too ill to get out of bed. What can I do to clean my teeth?**

If you are having a difficult day and feel unable to get out of bed, please don't neglect your teeth. It may be possible to ask a member of your family or your carer to help, or failing that, to use a chlorhexidine mouthwash (0.2 – 0.12%) twice a day.





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CFS who take  
medication (e.g.  
anti-depressants)  
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This in turn will  
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gum disease.*



## LOOKING AFTER YOUR TEETH

It is important to follow any instructions given to you by your dentist or hygienist. This would be sufficient for a short period of time.

### **I thought mouthwashes were used to freshen breath. How can they help my teeth?**

Mouthwashes can be used to freshen breath. However, more importantly, they are useful in a role to prevent cavities, e.g. by containing fluoride, and to prevent gum disease, e.g. by containing anti-bacterials. Gum disease and dental decay are the most common causes of bad breath (halitosis). There are also mouthwashes designed specifically to deal with halitosis. As with any unexplained symptoms, it is best to seek professional advice if they persist for longer than a couple of weeks.

### **What else should I think about to help care for my teeth?**

It is useful to bear in mind that people with ME/CFS who take medication (e.g. anti-depressants) or natural remedies for anxiety may suffer from a dry mouth. This in turn will increase the risk of tooth decay and gum disease.

Take frequent sips of water and consider chewing sugar-free xylitol-containing gum for 20 minutes after eating to increase the flow of saliva. Xylitol has been shown to have plaque-inhibiting properties. Artificial saliva can also be prescribed and is sometimes useful.

In the case of a dry mouth, high fluoride toothpastes (2800-5000ppm) might be advisable. In addition, the use of a fluoride mouthwash at a time other than when you brush your teeth is helpful. This can be daily (0.05%) or weekly (0.2%) and should be rinsed for one minute before spitting out. Your dentist or hygienist can also apply topical fluoride varnish to your teeth when appropriate.

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR TEETH

### Will diet also help?



A healthy balanced diet is good for everyone – especially a diet that includes complex carbohydrates and avoids too much caffeine.

Try to avoid sugar as much as possible and drink water rather than sugary drinks where you can. Decay-causing foods are usually more heavily processed and manufactured, e.g. confectionery, cakes and biscuits, buns, pastries, fruit pies, sugared cereals, jams, honey, ice-cream, fruit in syrup, fresh fruit juices, soft drinks and dried fruits.

*Try to avoid sugar as much as possible and drink water rather than sugary drinks where you can.*

### The two most healthy elements of a healthy diet are:

- Eating the right amount of food depending on your activity levels.
- Eating a range of foods as advised by the Food Standards Agency (2001)

Try not to eat snacks but, if you must, try to avoid the examples given above.

### Is there anything else that can damage my teeth?

Your teeth can also be damaged if they are exposed to acid in your diet, eg acidic fruit and fruit juice, carbonated drinks, wine, sports drinks, pickles, vitamin C tablets. This can be managed by limiting acidic intakes to mealtimes and not brushing immediately after an intake. High fluoride toothpastes are also useful.



*Most dentists will be sympathetic to your needs if you explain your problems to them. Dentists take their continuing education very seriously.*

## YOUR DENTIST AND ME/CFS

**My dentist doesn't understand ME and that I am not really well enough to undertake very much treatment without feeling poorly. What can I say to him?**

It is important that you develop a good relationship with your healthcare professional. You will then be able to have sensible discussions about any concerns you have with regard to your treatment and health management.

Most dentists will be sympathetic to your needs if you explain your problems to them. If they don't have sufficient information and understanding, then simply let them have copies of the booklets and leaflets you have obtained and details of relevant websites. Dentists take their continuing education very seriously.



### What else does my dentist need to know?

Always tell your dentist about your general health, previous dental history, any allergies you might have and most importantly, any medication you might be taking. You are most likely to be asked for updates when you attend for routine visits.

**I suffer from severe ME and I am mainly bed-bound. This means that I cannot visit the dentist. Would the dentist be able to visit me?**

It might be possible for you to arrange a home visit through your current dentist. Unfortunately, however, NHS funding is not available for dentists to provide this service, and it will probably be necessary to do this by referral to your Local Community Dental Services.

This will require research locally or via the 'Find a dentist' section on the NHS website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). We understand that eligibility criteria are quite strict and treatments may be limited to simple measures, e.g. extractions to provide pain relief.

You might already have a dentist who will be prepared to do this under private contract or, if you are lucky, and have been a long-standing patient, as a good will service.

There will be a limit to treatments available to you in your home.



*Sensitivity to drugs is common in people with ME/CFS but, where there is a serious infection, it is best to take antibiotics rather than risk an infection which can cause more severe health problems.*



## DENTAL PROBLEMS AND TREATMENTS

### **I have heard that, if I have my mercury fillings removed, this may help my ME. Is this true?**

For many years there have been concerns about the safety of mercury fillings (dental amalgam). This concern relates to the possibility that toxic metal could be slowly absorbed into the body.

Mercury toxicity has sometimes been linked to certain medical conditions including ME/CFS. However, in the opinion of the ME Association and the British Dental Association, there is no consistent evidence to support this view.

At the moment it is not advised to elect to have sound amalgam fillings removed. However, if you need to have a defective filling removed – eg one that's fractured or leaking – it would be perfectly reasonable to consider alternative materials for the replacement filling, such as composite resin, porcelain or gold.

### **What about antibiotics for tooth abscesses or severe tooth/mouth infections?**

It may be necessary, on occasion, for the dentist to recommend a course of antibiotics if you are showing systemic symptoms, such as feeling ill, increased temperature, swollen lymph glands. It is unlikely that this will be recommended unless absolutely essential.

Sensitivity to drugs is common in people with ME/CFS but, where there is a serious infection, it is best to take antibiotics rather than risk the infection causing more health problems.

Some people with ME/CFS do react badly to antibiotics. If you have had a bad reaction or an allergy to an antibiotic in the past, please be sure that you have told your dentist.

### **I suffer a lot with mouth ulcers. What can I do?**

Mouth ulcers are very common and usually heal within a couple of weeks. There are many possible causes and they are rarely serious.

As with any condition if you are worried, or the ulcers persist for longer than three weeks, it is important to seek professional advice.



## DENTAL PROBLEMS AND TREATMENTS

Usually, treatment is aimed at giving relief of symptoms by prescribing mouthwashes like hot salt water or chlorhexidine. Sometimes ulcers can be caused by sensitivity to sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS), a common ingredient in many brands of toothpaste.

If you get recurrent ulceration try an SLS-free toothpaste, like Sensodyne, Corsodyl daily, Rembrandt.

Your dentist will refer you for a second opinion if there is any doubt over the diagnosis or the management of the condition, e.g. oral cancer, celiac disease. It may be necessary for you to have blood tests or a biopsy for example, to obtain the diagnosis.



*Usually, treatment is aimed at giving relief of symptoms by prescribing mouthwashes like hot salt water or chlorhexidine.*

In general terms, if you observe any changes to the lining of your mouth it is important that you seek advice. Dentists are trained to pick up early signs of oral cancer and oral signs of systemic disease. They will carry out an examination of the mouth lining every time you attend for an examination.

### And finally...

Look after your teeth and gums, eat a healthy balanced diet, don't smoke and visit your dentist and hygienist regularly. Follow these simple guidelines and the likelihood of you needing extensive treatment will be reduced.



**Disclaimer:** Medical information contained here is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice or treatment from a GP or dentist. Availability of any drugs cited in this leaflet will depend on general availability and the type of syringes and other equipment used by the dentist or dental surgeon.



*“Thank you for producing such a helpful magazine. The standard is consistently high and each edition is interesting and varied. I need all the help I can get and this magazine is consistently encouraging, realistic, and helpful.”*



## THE ME ASSOCIATION

*Changing attitudes and improving lives...*

■ **COMMUNITY:** We provide a safe and welcoming community for people affected by ME/CFS and Long Covid who come together and benefit from sharing their experiences. We provide membership, an essential support service, excellent website resources and we host engaging discussions on the most popular social media channels. Knowing that you are not alone can be a great comfort and we are happy to answer your questions and share helpful tips.

■ **MEMBERSHIP:** We put the interests of members at the heart of everything we do. Your subscription means that we can support more people, campaign more effectively and fund more medical research. Members receive the exclusive ME Essential magazine which carries the latest news, medical information, personal stories, and feature articles. **Join us today.**

■ **SUPPORT:** ME Connect is the charity’s support and information service. We listen and we understand. We provide a personalised service and we’re here when you need us most. We have knowledge and understanding of these medical conditions. To view the ME Connect telephone helpline opening hours, please visit: <https://www.meassociation.org.uk/me-connect>

■ **INFORMATION:** We produce reliable and timely information written by topic experts and have the **largest range of free literature covering all aspects of life with ME/CFS and Long Covid**. We can show you how to recognise and manage symptoms, get an accurate diagnosis, a referral to specialists, and to obtain the healthcare that you deserve. We also provide an **e-newsletter** and free access on the website to **Medical Matters** and other relevant information.

■ **RESEARCH:** We fund medical research via the **Ramsay Research Fund** and are especially interested in research that can find diagnostic markers, causes, and treatments. We support the UK ME/CFS Biobank and the Manchester Brain Bank, and have invested over £1m in medical research in the last 10 years.

■ **MEDICAL EDUCATION:** We arrange training for healthcare professionals, offer a medical magazine, ME Medical, and are working with the Government, NHS, Royal Colleges of Medicine, and Local Authorities to implement the recommendations of the 2021 NICE Clinical Guideline on ME/CFS – the successful result of 14 years lobbying and hard work.

*“The MEA is doing exactly what it said it would by providing support, actively lobbying for recognition, improvements to health and social care, and funding biomedical research.”*



## THE ME ASSOCIATION

*Changing attitudes and improving lives...*

■ **LOBBYING:** We campaign to raise awareness and bring about positive change. We believe in collaboration and work with the NHS and social care services, the Department of Health and Social Care, the British Association of Clinicians in ME/CFS (BACME), Forward-ME, the ME Research Collaborative (MERC), DecodeME, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on ME, Physios4ME, the Chronic Illness Inclusion project (CII), Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, and Long Covid initiatives.

■ **HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE:** The charity works with healthcare providers to successfully implement the NICE Guideline recommendations on ME/CFS and Long Covid to ensure that everyone receives the very best healthcare, wherever they live in the UK. We want well-trained healthcare professionals providing excellent services because timely intervention can lead to better health outcomes and improved quality of life.

■ **DONATIONS:** In order to help more people and invest in medical research, we depend on your generosity. If you feel able to make a donation or want to raise funds in other ways, please get in touch with the fundraising team: [fundraising@meassociation.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@meassociation.org.uk) or you can **make a direct donation via the website.**

### WHAT ARE ME/CFS AND LONG COVID?

We answer key questions about these medical conditions and compare similarities and differences. You'll also find the NICE Guideline reproduced in full in an easy-to-use database.

### MEDICAL MATTERS

**Medical Matters** is an easy to use online supplement to the more detailed literature. The same topic experts provide answers to commonly asked questions.

### NHS REFERRAL SERVICES

If you need to locate an ME/CFS specialist service or Long Covid Clinic then we can help. We have listed all secondary care referral services in an easy-to-use database.



## ME CONNECT

The Support and  
Information Service for  
people affected  
by ME/CFS/PVFS  
and Long Covid



**Freephone**  
**0808 801 0484**

For opening hours visit:  
[meassociation.org.uk/me-connect](https://meassociation.org.uk/me-connect)

Contact ME Connect  
**3 WAYS TO GET IN TOUCH:**  
by phone, email  
or social media private message



### HERE TO LISTEN

We are here to listen, validate and empathise with any issues you might be facing.



### VITAL SUPPORT

We are here to help you reach an informed decision.



### SAFE ENVIRONMENT

We provide a safe, confidential and understanding environment where you can be heard and understood.

*We're here for you!*



[meconnect@meassociation.org.uk](mailto:meconnect@meassociation.org.uk)



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