



SCLERODERMA & ORAL HEALTH

Scleroderma can affect the mouth,
teeth and general oral health.



scleroderma **australia**

Oral, facial and dental impact

Scleroderma can cause changes around your mouth. This may limit mouth opening, make your gums or tongue look different because of blood vessel changes, make your mouth feel dry, as well as change the shape of your jaws and jaw joints. Dental treatment can be difficult due to limited opening sometimes requiring the use of smaller dental instruments such as those used for children. Limited opening can also make it difficult taking moulds for dentures. Where possible, preventing dental decay, rather than trying to treat established decay, is important.

Reduction in mouth opening (microstomia)

As the skin around the mouth becomes tighter, the size of your mouth opening decreases. This may impact on eating, the sound of your speech, and the ability to clean your teeth or to have dental work. Mouth stretching exercises seem to be the best treatment and the earlier the exercises are started the better. It is recommended that you do the exercises once or twice a day. The exercises should not cause pain. Please see the Mouth Movement Maintenance page for more tips.

Tooth decay and gum disease

Scleroderma can cause gum disease but does not mean that you will necessarily get tooth decay. Tooth decay is preventable and reversible in the early stages. Your dentist can identify the signs of early decay and help develop a plan to slow the gum disease and prevent or treat the decay before it needs a filling.

Many of the same things help prevent both gum disease and decay. The most important thing is trying to keep your teeth clean. When cleaning your teeth, remember to clean all the tooth surfaces especially around the gums and in between the teeth where food and plaque

can get stuck. Brushing should be completed twice a day with a toothpaste containing fluoride. Using a children's toothbrush or an electric toothbrush may make this easier. If floss is difficult to use, you can use interdental brushes, floss sticks, or water floss devices to clean between your teeth. Your oral health professional can help you decide what might work best for you.

You can also help prevent decay by reducing the risk factors that cause decay and increasing the factors that protect and strengthen teeth. The things that make our teeth more susceptible to decay include sugars and acids in our diet, poor oral hygiene, and less saliva. Fluoride in toothpastes and tap water are important to strengthening the tooth enamel. When brushing your teeth, it is recommended that you spit out the excess without rinsing out the toothpaste to maximise the fluoride exposure. There are toothpastes with higher amounts of fluoride that may increase this protection. You should speak to your dentist about whether they would recommend these for your mouth.

Dry Mouth

Reduced saliva and the feeling of dryness in the mouth are common in scleroderma. This may be caused by the scleroderma itself or by your medications. Saliva has a protective role in the mouth and helps create a balance that prevents decay, oral thrush, and ulcers. It is also important to being comfortable during speaking, eating, and swallowing. If your mouth feels dry, there are many dry mouth products you can use from the pharmacist. Some really simple tricks to help rebalance your mouth can include using a plant-based oil (e.g. olive oil) as a mouth moisturiser, chewing sugar-free gum or eating fibrous (fruits, vegetables) or dairy foods to stimulate saliva flow, using a bicarbonate

mouthwash to reduce acidity, and, most importantly, remaining hydrated. It is also important to try and reduce things that may make you more dehydrated like smoking, alcohol, and caffeine.

Ulcers and salivary gland swelling

Ulcers or sores in the mouth which come and go are common in scleroderma. Over-the-counter products from your pharmacist can provide some symptomatic relief. However, if your ulcers persist (greater than 2 weeks) and/or you would like more advice on how to treat your ulcers, please speak to your oral health professional.

You may also experience enlargement of your salivary glands (usually under your chin or in front of your ears). If this swelling lasts for more than two weeks, consult a health professional.

Mouth Movement Maintenance

Before starting your exercises, ensure that your facial muscles and skin are warm. You may want to use a heat pack for 30 seconds. Don't forget to apply lip-balm before commencing the exercises.

Continued on reverse...

Maintenance Steps

STEP 1

Place your thumb in opposite corner of your mouth and stretch



STEP 2

Open the mouth as wide as you can



STEP 3

Open the mouth as wide as you can but this time, keep your lips over your teeth



STEP 4

Pull your lower jaw downwards



STEP 5

Purse your lips together



STEP 6

Puff out your cheeks



STEP 7

Move your jaw to the left and then right



STEP 8

Move your jaw forwards
as far as you can



STEP 9

Open your mouth, tilt your
head backwards and close
your mouth in that position



STEP 10

Use both your thumbs to stretch
both your cheeks at the same time



STEP 11

Make an exaggerated grin



STEP 12

Count the number of paddle pop
sticks you can insert between your
teeth, try to maintain this number



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