



When it comes to your medical history, tell your dentist everything.

Why does the dentist need to know about your hospitalizations, medications, allergies, and other personal medical problems? After all, having a dental cleaning or a filling is not a big deal, right?

The answer may not be as simple as you think. Most dental treatment is quite uneventful. However, sometimes your health condition can influence the way your dental treatment needs to be provided, and require your dentist to make certain changes to help avoid potential problems. What might seem like a small thing could be really important.

Your dentist wants to provide the best possible treatment for you, as safely as possible. Many health conditions, ranging from heart problems to allergies, even certain medications, can affect the way your dentist needs to approach your care.

Here are a few examples.

- If dental procedures are planned that might involve bleeding, your dentist wants to know that your blood will clot normally. Blood clotting can be affected by many conditions, such as liver disease. Medications, including aspirin and even some herbal preparations, can also interfere with normal blood clotting.
- Your dentist relies on a healthy immune system to help fight infections. Some conditions like diabetes, and some medications like steroids, reduce the effectiveness of your immune system.

- Many patients need to take preventive antibiotics before certain dental procedures are performed. For example, some patients with a heart murmur, or an artificial hip or knee, may need to take an antibiotic prior to certain treatments to help prevent a serious infection from occurring.

It is very important for your dentist to understand as much as possible about your past and current health condition. It also means that it is important for your dentist to take an initial complete medical history, and to keep it up-to-date by checking with you on a regular basis.

All this information on your medical history questionnaire is kept strictly private, and is protected by doctor-patient confidentiality. It will not be shared with anyone outside your dentist's office without your permission.

Sometimes your dentist may wish to speak with your family doctor or medical specialist to get more details about your medical situation. If your dentist needs to consult with your doctor or another health-care provider, this will be discussed with you first.

As you can see, your medical health and your dental health are closely linked. You and your dentist are partners, working together to provide you with the best possible dental care. That is why it is so important to carefully and thoroughly answer all the questions on the medical history questionnaire. Each question is there for a reason. If you do not understand any question, or you are not sure about the answer to any question, just ask your dentist. ■