

# Protecting Your Pearly Whites

By Trudie Mitschang

**FOR INDIVIDUALS** diagnosed with primary immunodeficiency (PI), maintaining optimal oral health can be a challenge since their lack of antibodies or immune cells makes it difficult to fight infections, especially those impacting the mouth and gums.

## Understanding the Risks

Individuals diagnosed with PI are at higher risk of experiencing oral bacterial infections such as staph abscesses, viral infections like herpes simplex, and oral fungal infections (also known as candidiasis or oral thrush). These infections, in turn, can lead to a higher incidence of gingivitis, gum disease, periodontitis and dry mouth syndrome.

Gingivitis is a common, chronic gum infection involving the soft tissue surrounding the teeth. Signs of infection include gums that bleed during brushing or flossing, swelling around the teeth and halitosis (bad breath). If left untreated, gingivitis can lead to periodontitis, a serious gum infection that causes supporting bone under the teeth to resorb, leaving loose and painful teeth.

Medications that can cause decreased saliva flow, leading to a condition called dry mouth syndrome are another risk factor. It's important to note that adequate saliva flow is necessary to keep the mouth free of food particles, maintain proper lubrication of the teeth and soft tissues, and ensure the mouth has a chemically balanced environment rich in calcium, phosphate and acid-buffering agents. All of these factors help to reduce the risk of dental cavities.

## Staying Safe During Invasive Procedures

For PI patients, the risks of complications from invasive dental work can be significant. For example, if patients are prescribed high-dose steroids, they may not be able to cope with the stress of invasive dental work since their adrenal glands may not adequately produce the hormones needed to protect against trauma. In addition, dental procedures that involve local anesthetics and/or deep drilling into teeth can cause bleeding in the oral cavity. People with PI are at higher risk for bacterial blood infection (sepsis) since bacteria can be introduced into the blood stream from the mouth. Symptoms of sepsis include fever, chills or shaking. In severe cases, septic shock can occur, requiring immediate medical intervention and hospitalization. If there is an underlying



cardiac condition, artificial joints or an oral bacterial infection, patients may require antibiotics prior to undergoing invasive dental work.

All PI patients should be carefully monitored prior, during and after any invasive dental procedure. A primary care physician or immunologist should also be consulted during the treatment-planning stage to ensure the dentistry will be delivered in a safe manner.

Also keep in mind that patients who are treated with monthly intravenous immune globulin (IG) or weekly subcutaneous IG must ensure their blood IgG levels are above 600 mg/dL before undergoing invasive dental work. If levels are below 600 mg/dL, it is possible to receive a booster dose of IG prior to the procedure.

## Dental Tips for PI Patients

Common sense dictates PI patients should be vigilant when it comes to dental hygiene and get regular dental checkups. It's also advisable to take extra care when brushing and flossing and to use antiseptic mouthwash. In addition, PI patients should:

- Tell their dentist about all medicines they are taking prior to undergoing any invasive dental procedures.
- See their doctor right away if they notice signs of dental abscesses, cold sores or thrush. The doctor can prescribe antibiotics and/or antiviral or antifungal medication to treat these infections so they do not become severe.

PI patients are more susceptible to dental problems because of their high risk of infections. Good oral hygiene and ongoing communication with a dentist are crucial to ensure the risks of infection are minimized. As with all other aspects of healthcare, a team approach is ideal; partnering with a dentist, physician and periodontist can ensure a healthy oral outcome. ■

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## Dry Mouth Relief

XyliMelts for Dry Mouth is an all-natural oral adhering disc that time releases a 500 mg amount of xylitol and oral lubricant to relieve dry mouth and reduce tooth decay. XyliMelts is the only dry mouth remedy for use while sleeping when dry mouth is worst. It comes in a three-pack with 40 discs each.

\$24.89; [walmart.com](http://walmart.com)

## Making Flossing Fun

Cocofloss describes itself as a “loofah for your smile.” The product uses hundreds of filaments to scrub away plaque and grime and promises to leave gums purified. It contains coconut oil and tropical fruit fragrances for a more pleasant experience. It comes in a three-pack in multiflavors.

\$22; [cocofloss.com](http://cocofloss.com)



## High-Tech Toothbrush

Kolibree uses technology to show people how well they’re brushing and tracks progress. Kolibree has partnered with Colgate to launch the Colgate Smart Electronic Toothbrush E1 with Artificial Intelligence, which is sold exclusively through Apple.

\$99; [apple.com](http://apple.com)

# Shopping Guide to Dental Products



## Rinse and Refresh



Biotene Dry Mouth Oral Rinse uses the LP3 salivary enzyme-protein system to help prevent tooth decay and oral disease, soothe minor irritation, fight bad breath and refresh and moisturize the mouth throughout the day. It is alcohol-free, so it will freshen breath without leaving a stinging sensation behind. It comes in a three-pack. \$7.19;

[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

## Turn on the Water Works

Waterpik Complete Care 5.0 Water Flosser and Triple Sonic Toothbrush is a combined water flosser and toothbrush to keep teeth clean and healthy. It features three brushing speeds and modes for flexible dental care.

\$99; [bestbuy.com](http://bestbuy.com)



## Total Mouth Care

Dr. Tungs Stainless Steel Tongue Cleaner glides on the tongue to remove harmful bacteria and debris even from the back of the tongue. Dental experts say it’s about five times more effective for tongue cleaning than a toothbrush.

\$6.19; [vitacost.com](http://vitacost.com)

