

Resource

## Oral Health

Patients with RA can experience problems with their mouths. Some are directly related to RA such as gum disease, jaw problems and dry mouth and some indirectly, e.g. as a result of RA medication or difficulty cleaning teeth.

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### Introduction



The mouth plays an important role in the functioning of the human body; teeth chew food into smaller pieces to make it more digestible, and saliva contains enzymes which further break down food. Saliva also helps prevent infections and is required for swallowing.

Teeth are held in place in the jaw bone by support from the surrounding gums and ligaments (fibrous tissue), making gum health very important too. From an appearance point of view, having a nice smile can boost a person's confidence.

Patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can experience problems with their mouths. Some are directly related to RA such as gum disease, jaw problems and dry mouth (i.e. lack of saliva) and some are indirectly related to RA; being a result of RA medication or caused by difficulty with cleaning the mouth (due to problems with other joints). This will not be a problem for all people with RA, but it may

be helpful to be aware of these potential problems so that you know what to look out for and what you might want to discuss with your dentist.

Dentists, dental therapists and dental hygienists can help with assessing and treating mouth problems as well as giving advice on how to keep your mouth healthy.

This section will cover the following topics which you can go directly to by clicking on the heading:

[Gum disease](#)

[Jaw problems](#)

[Dry mouth](#)

[RA medication and the mouth](#)

[Smoking](#)

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[Gum Disease](#)

[Gum disease affects almost half of all adults in the UK and can be a particular issue for people with RA.](#)

[Article](#)

[Jaw problems](#)

[RA can affect the jaw, just as it can affect any other joint in the body, and it is estimated that in more than 17% of patients with RA, the jaw joint is affected.](#)



[Article](#)

## [Dry Mouth](#)

[Dry mouth is more common in people with RA, and this can have a big impact on oral health. Saliva is important for many reasons, including keeping the mouth clean and free from gum disease and infection.](#)

[Article](#)

## [RA medication and the mouth](#)

[Medication can do a lot of good in controlling your RA, but it is also important to know that some RA medications can affect the mouth.](#)



[Article](#)

## [Effects of smoking on gums](#)

[Smoking is a major risk factor for RA, and heavy smoking more than doubles the risk. It is also the number one risk factor for gum disease, which people with RA are already more susceptible to.](#)



[Article](#)

## [Cleaning advice and tips](#)

[There are now many more products available to help you to ensure that your teeth are kept clean, reducing the risk of oral health problems such as gum disease.](#)



[Article](#)

## [Visiting the dentist](#)

[Visiting the dentist need not be a dreaded experience. Your dentist and dental care team \(i.e. dental therapists, hygienists, nurses, etc.\) are here to help you.](#)

[Article](#)

## [Further reading/useful links](#)

[Links to useful information and organisations to help with oral health.](#)

References available on request

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