



Oral Health and Endocarditis

People with heart valve disease are at increased risk of infective endocarditis.

What is infective endocarditis?

Infective Endocarditis is an infection of the inner lining of the heart and affects the heart valves.

Heart valves are like flaps that control the flow of blood through the heart. People with heart valve disease have heart valves which do not function properly and start to leak. Germs (bacteria) that enter the blood stream, can rest on these valves and form a cluster.

Over time the cluster can grow bigger and cause an infection to the valves or the lining of the heart. This is called infective endocarditis.

The infection can damage your heart valves which may make your heart work harder to pump blood, and sometimes the cluster may break away and lodge in other major organs and cause damage.

Your medical or dental practitioner can tell you if your heart condition places you at a higher risk for infective endocarditis.

Why is good oral hygiene important?

Poor oral hygiene is a risk factor for infective endocarditis. An unclean mouth with lots of germs can place your heart health at risk by allowing germs to get into the body and blood stream. Good oral hygiene means removing the layer of plaque (germs and food) that forms daily on our teeth and gums.

Dental treatments such as a scale and clean, or a dental extraction, present a risk for patients at risk of infective endocarditis. Any time there is bleeding in the gums, the germs can enter the bloodstream, travel to the heart and may cause an infective endocarditis. The dentist may prescribe antibiotics to kill the germs that may get into the blood stream during these procedures. Antibiotics are prescribed as recommended by the Australian Therapeutic Guidelines.

How to reduce the risk?

- Clean your teeth thoroughly twice a day using fluoride toothpaste and floss daily.
- Eat a healthy diet. Limit sugary foods and drinks especially between meals as sugar encourages the growth of germs in the mouth.
- If antibiotics are prescribed, follow the instructions provided by your health care practitioner.
- Attend regular dental check-ups and inform your dental practitioner of your heart valve disease.

For further information please discuss with your dental practitioner

Would you like more information or to provide feedback?

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as braille, audio tape or electronically on request.



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