

DENTAL PROBLEMS WITH ARTHRITIS

Dear Dr. McCrummen: I have arthritis, have a painfully difficult time holding a brush, and cannot floss. Also, my mouth is very dry. Do you have any recommendations for those of us that suffer with this crippling disease to help us stay healthy? Is it true that using Listerine is just as good as flossing, like they say in their ads? P.S.

Arthritis leaves the joints in the hands stiff and painful, making it difficult to maintain good oral health between dental visits. It is common to see decay and gum disease get worse as arthritis gets worse. There are some things you can do, and items you can buy to help reduce the adverse effects on your teeth and gums.

Try to find a brush with a large handle that fits comfortably in your hand. There are some available if you want to stay with a manual brush, but they are not easy to find. It may require a special order from your pharmacist. A sonic electric toothbrush, like the *Sonicare Elite*, and the *WaterPik DT-400* would be excellent. An electric toothbrush will do the work for you. You just need to hold it on the teeth at the gumline. I believe both can be seen at Target and KMART, maybe other stores, and the *Sonicare Elite* can be seen at Costco. It is important that you hold them in your hand and feel if they are comfortable before you buy one. A cushioned handle makes it even more comfortable. Popsicle sticks placed on either side of a regular straight handled toothbrush wrapped with tape is an old solution for brushing with stiff, arthritic hands.

For flossing, I feel a new device called *Reach Access* would be worth a try. It is the best product I have seen for people that can't, or do not want to put their fingers in their mouths. The handle is wide but flat, so the tape and Popsicle stick trick may be needed. *Listerine*, or the generic form (with identical ingredients), in mint or citrus flavor would be good to rinse with at least three times a day. Put some in your mouth just before a brushing to work it under the gumline. *Listerine* is a very good product for reducing organisms that cause disease. However, I do not believe it should be used instead of flossing. Doing both would be best. It cannot get between teeth or under the gumline where only floss can go to disrupt bacterial colonies.

It is important that you are seen by your dentist at their recommended interval for professional cleanings. If you are unable to clean your teeth properly your hygienist needs to help you more often. More than twice a year might be in your best interest. Your hygienist can tell you where you are missing, how to do a better job, and recommend other products that work well.