

# ANTIBIOTIC PROPHYLAXIS PRIOR TO DENTAL PROCEDURES

## Antibiotics Before Dental Work ("Premedication")

Sometimes doctors or dentists recommend taking antibiotics before certain dental procedures. This is called **antibiotic prophylaxis** or **premedication**. The purpose is to lower the chance of bacteria from the mouth causing serious infections in other parts of the body.

The American Dental Association (ADA) no longer recommends routine antibiotic premedication for most patients, as the risks of side effects and antibiotic resistance often outweigh the benefits. A healthy immune system can handle the small amount of bacteria that enters the bloodstream during routine dental care. Routine activities like brushing and flossing already expose your body to oral bacteria, therefore premedication is now reserved for a small number of patients with specific, high-risk conditions who are undergoing procedures that involve manipulating the gums or soft tissue in the oral cavity.

## Who Does NOT Need Antibiotics

- People with **joint replacements** (such as hips or knees). Current evidence shows that dental procedures do **NOT** cause infections in prosthetic joints. Therefore, antibiotics are **not routinely recommended**.
- The only exception is for patients who have had complications with their joint replacement or who have serious health conditions. In those cases, your **orthopedic surgeon** (not your dentist) should decide whether antibiotics are necessary, and they should be the ones to prescribe the antibiotic.

## Who May Need Antibiotics

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends premedication only for patients with certain serious heart conditions, because they are at highest risk for a dangerous heart infection called **infective endocarditis**. This includes:

- Artificial heart valves (or prosthetic material used for valve repair)
- A history of infective endocarditis
- Certain congenital (from birth) heart defects, especially if not fully repaired or if there are leaks around prosthetic material
- Heart transplant patients who develop valve regurgitation

## Which Dental Procedures Matter

If you are in one of the high-risk groups above, antibiotics may be recommended for dental treatments that:

- Involve the gums
- Work near the root tips of teeth
- Cut into the inside of the mouth

## Important Notes

- If antibiotics are needed, they should be taken **1 hour** prior to your dental appointment. If forgotten, they can still be taken up to **2 hours** afterward.
- If you're already on antibiotics for another reason, please inform your prescribing physician as they may choose a different type for premedication.
- **2g of amoxicillin** is the first choice of antibiotic. If you have a penicillin allergy, **2g cephalexin** is the alternative antibiotic. For children, the dose will be dependent on their weight.
- Clindamycin is no longer recommended because of its higher risk of side effects.

- The prescription should be written by your prescribing physician, i.e. cardiologist or orthopedic surgeon.
- If you forget to take your pre-medication, we have it available at our office for **\$25**.

**Bottom Line:**

Most patients do **not** need antibiotics before dental work. They are only recommended for people with certain serious **heart conditions** or, in rare cases, specific joint replacement complications.

It is recommended that you speak with your dentist who will collaborate with your other healthcare providers, such as your cardiologist or orthopedic surgeon, to make a shared decision.