

## Reliable Information Sources

These organizations are likely to share findings of studies on rheumatoid arthritis and oral health as they become available:

American Academy of Periodontology  
[www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org)

American College of Rheumatology  
[www.rheumatology.org](http://www.rheumatology.org)

American Dental Association  
[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

Arthritis Self-Management  
[www.arthritisselfmanagement.com](http://www.arthritisselfmanagement.com)

The Arthritis Foundation  
[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

WebMD  
[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

 **DELTA DENTAL**

## Rheumatoid Arthritis and Oral Health



 **DELTA DENTAL**

**Northeast Delta Dental**  
One Delta Drive  
PO Box 2002  
Concord, NH 03302-2002  
603-223-1000  
[www.nedelta.com](http://www.nedelta.com)



### Oral Health Impacts Overall Health

Oral health is an essential component of overall health, and recognizing how oral health can be impacted by a disease or other chronic medical condition is extremely important.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) affects 1.5 million adults, and nearly 300,000 children suffer from juvenile arthritis and other rheumatologic conditions, according to the Arthritis Foundation. Studies suggest that those with RA may be at increased risk for developing gum (periodontal) disease. These studies focus on the possible links between gum disease (periodontitis) and rheumatoid arthritis, because both are inflammatory conditions.

Although the possible linkage between rheumatoid arthritis and gum disease needs more research, researchers hope that the results of their studies will lead to a greater understanding of the progression of rheumatoid arthritis and gum disease and how these diseases may be related. The hope is that, ultimately, controlling the symptoms of RA will have a positive impact on oral health, and controlling gum health issues will likewise impact RA in a beneficial way.

Gum disease can be prevented or, if caught early, can be easily controlled with good home care and some professional supervision.

If you have been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, visit your dentist at least once a year. If you have gum disease, you may need to see your

dentist three or four times a year for periodontal care to keep your gums healthy. Also report any oral health issues, like gum disease, to your medical care providers. By sharing information directly with your physicians and dentist and/or authorizing them to confer with each other about your RA and your oral health, they will be better equipped with all of the health information needed to give you consistent, comprehensive care.

### Dry Mouth Affects Oral Health

Sjögren's syndrome, an inflammatory auto-immune disorder, often develops secondary to other rheumatic diseases and is primarily manifest by dry mouth (xerostomia). Hundreds of medications also produce dry mouth as a side effect. Decreased saliva production can affect your oral health, because saliva's role in the mouth includes washing away food particles, killing germs, and helping to rebuild tooth enamel.

If you frequently experience dry mouth, you are at particularly high risk to develop tooth decay. Talk to your dentist or hygienist about daily fluoride rinses and other fluoride treatments and about more frequent recall exams. If your dry mouth is caused by medications that you are taking, ask your physician if there are any substitute medications that do not cause dry mouth.

One way that saliva production can be stimulated is by chewing sugar-free gums or mints. Look for products containing Xylitol as the primary sweetener, because this healthy sugar alternative helps prevent tooth decay.

More information on dry mouth, Xylitol, and other oral health topics are available on the Northeast Delta Dental website at [www.nedelta.com](http://www.nedelta.com).

### Oral Health Aids Improve Self-Care

Your oral health is important, but living with rheumatoid arthritis may make daily oral health self-care more difficult. Oral health specialists recommend brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and flossing at least once a day. If you experience limited movement and pain in your hands and wrists, an electric toothbrush may help by providing the movement over the surfaces of your teeth that is necessary to clean them thoroughly. If you are unable to floss manually, you may benefit from one of the many floss aids on the market today. Ask your dentist for his or her recommendations of products that could make self-care less painful and more effective.

