

Talking with Patients

Bleeding Disorders and Oral Health

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WHAT IS IT?

When a blood vessel is ruptured, the body immediately initiates a well-orchestrated series of events to stop the bleeding. Clotting of ruptured blood vessels is essential to avoid excessive blood loss, which can lead to complications such as organ failure and even death. Too much blood clotting, on the other hand, also can cause problems such as stroke and heart problems. Blood clotting is fine-tuned by cells and molecules normally present in the blood, known as blood coagulation factors or clotting factors. Bleeding disorders encompass a number of different medical problems that result in poor blood clotting and continuous bleeding.¹ Bleeding disorders can be caused by defects in the blood vessels or by abnormalities in the blood clotting factors. Bleeding also may be increased in people who have too few or poor-quality platelets, the first type of blood cell that helps establish the clot at the ruptured blood vessel.

Signs of bleeding disorders include excessive and easy bleeding, bruising (internal bleeding), nose bleeding, gum bleeding, and abnormal menstrual bleeding. Bleeding

disorders can affect men and women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. The most common types of inherited bleeding disorders are hemophilia and von Willebrand's disease.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ORAL HEALTH?

Bleeding disorders may have a significant impact on your oral health and on any dental treatment you may need.² People with bleeding disorders and gum problems (gingivitis or periodontitis) can suffer from excessive and easy gum bleeding. Also, if teeth need to be removed because of poor oral care, patients with bleeding disorders might have excessive bleeding and poor healing after the extractions. Even routine dental care such as cleanings and fillings can pose a problem for individuals with severe bleeding disorders. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that these individuals inform their dental care providers (dentists and/or hygienists) about their condition.

Depending on the severity of the bleeding disorder and the nature and complexity of the dental treatment needs, the dentist can consult the patient's physician and establish a plan of action that will allow the

patient to be treated with minimal risks.^{1,2} Simple procedures can be completed at a regular dental office, but for multiple tooth extractions or other gum or root surgical procedures, the patient might need to be admitted to a hospital for treatment.

CONCLUSIONS

Bleeding disorders affect the capacity of the body to close ruptured blood vessels. When not properly controlled by medication, bleeding disorders can significantly impact oral health and dental treatment. Routine dental procedures such as cleanings, tooth extractions, minor gum surgeries, and even local anesthetics for fillings can result in serious complications if the dentist is not aware of the condition.

Bleeding disorders can be controlled by proper medical care. It is important to note that blood thinners, which might be used to prevent heart attack and stroke, can aggravate bleeding of ruptured blood vessels. Therefore, it is imperative that the patient's dentist and physician work together to ensure the best therapy is in place so that dental care can be provided in a safe manner.

DISCLOSURE

The author does not have any financial interest in the manufacturers whose materials are discussed in this article.

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