

## Mouth Matters: Depression's Influence on Burning Mouth Syndrome and Oral Care Resilience During the Pandemic

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to individuals' physical and mental well-being, shedding light on the intricate connections between oral care, depression, and Burning Mouth Syndrome (BMS). This abstract explores the profound implications of oral care resilience in the context of a pandemic and its direct influence on depression and BMS. As stress and isolation have become prevalent during these times, they have, in turn, contributed to an increase in depression rates. Such emotional distress, coupled with poor oral hygiene practices, can exacerbate oral health issues and potentially lead to the development or worsening of BMS.

The intricate interplay between mental health and physical well-being has been a subject of growing interest, particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As individuals navigate the challenges brought on by the pandemic, the impact on mental health has become increasingly apparent. This article delves into the relationship between depression and Burning Mouth Syndrome (BMS), exploring how the psychological toll of the pandemic may contribute to oral health issues. Frailty, disability, sarcopenia, care dependency, and limited access to professional oral healthcare can also compromise the oral health of older people. To prevent rapid oral health deterioration, a comprehensive approach is required that involves effective communication between oral healthcare providers, other healthcare providers, and informal caregivers. Oral healthcare providers have a responsibility to advocate for the importance of maintaining adequate oral health and to raise awareness of the serious consequences of weakened oral health. By doing so, we can prevent weakened oral health from becoming a geriatric syndrome.

**Keywords:** Oral health care; Older people; Multimorbidity; Polypharmacy; Frailty; Sarcopenia; Disability

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted nearly every facet of our lives, from our daily routines to our physical and mental health. Among the less-discussed consequences are the intricate connections between oral care, depression, and the mysterious condition known as Burning Mouth Syndrome (BMS) [1]. In this article, we explore the role of oral care in building resilience against these challenges during a pandemic and how it can mitigate their impact on individuals.

Among the frailest and most care-dependent older adults, dental caries, periodontal disease, tooth loss, and xerostomia are particularly prevalent. Despite the fact that most chronic oral diseases are preventable and treatable, a variety of factors make it difficult to maintain good oral health as people age. Ageing is typically viewed as a gradual decline in the functioning of various bodily systems, stemming from the accumulation of damaged tissue and substances caused by intrinsic or extrinsic mechanisms [2]. The process of biological ageing is a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon, and although the exact molecular mechanisms behind its onset and progression remain unclear, ample evidence suggests that oxidative stress may play a significant role. Kinases, phosphatases, and transcription factors are particularly sensitive to changes in cellular redox status, and chronic or severe disruptions in this homeostasis can result in cell death or proliferation. Immune senescence, or the quantitative and qualitative changes in the immune system that accompany ageing, is another hallmark of this process [3].

### Understanding the Connection

Before we delve into the relationship between oral care, depression, and BMS, it's essential to understand each of these components.

**Depression:** The pandemic has been a period of heightened stress, uncertainty, and social isolation for many. These factors have

contributed to a rise in depression rates [4]. Depression not only affects one's mental state but also has physical manifestations, some of which can affect oral health.

**Burning mouth syndrome (BMS):** Burning Mouth Syndrome, characterized by a persistent burning or tingling sensation in the mouth without an apparent cause, has long been recognized as a multifaceted condition. Emerging evidence suggests that psychological factors, such as stress and depression, may play a pivotal role in the development and exacerbation of BMS. As depression becomes more prevalent, understanding its potential links to oral health disorders like BMS becomes crucial for comprehensive healthcare. [5].

**Oral care:** Good oral hygiene practices, including regular brushing, flossing, and dental check-ups, are essential for maintaining oral health. Neglecting oral care can lead to various dental and gum issues.

### The Interplay

As we navigate the pandemic, the interplay between these factors becomes evident:

**Impact on mental health:** The stress, isolation, and uncertainty of the pandemic have taken a toll on mental health. Depression, anxiety,

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and stress can lead to changes in oral habits, including decreased oral hygiene and increased consumption of comfort foods and sugary snacks [6].

**The role of oral care:** Neglecting oral care can exacerbate oral health issues, increasing the risk of dental problems. Poor oral health can be a source of discomfort, embarrassment, and additional stress for individuals already struggling with depression or BMS [7].

**The vicious cycle:** A vicious cycle can emerge, where depression and BMS can lead to worsened oral hygiene practices and, in turn, worsened oral health, causing additional emotional distress.

### Oral Care Resilience

The pandemic has made it clear that maintaining strong oral care practices is essential for overall well-being and resilience in the face of depression and BMS. Here are some ways oral care can build resilience:

**Consistent oral hygiene:** Regular brushing, flossing, and dental check-ups are crucial for preventing dental issues. Maintaining good oral health can boost confidence and reduce the chances of discomfort or embarrassment [8].

**Stress management:** Effective stress management techniques, such as meditation, exercise, and counseling, can help individuals cope with the mental health challenges brought about by the pandemic. Reduced stress levels can, in turn, alleviate symptoms of BMS and prevent the exacerbation of depression [9].

**Seeking professional help:** Individuals struggling with depression or BMS should seek professional help. Mental health care and guidance from dental professionals can provide valuable support and resources [10].

Recognizing the interconnectedness of mental health and oral health is the first step toward holistic well-being. Healthcare professionals and individuals alike can adopt strategies to break the cycle of depression and its potential impact on oral health:

**Integrated Healthcare:** Collaborative efforts between mental health professionals and dentists can facilitate a more comprehensive approach to patient care, addressing both psychological and oral health needs.

**Stress Management Techniques:** Implementing stress management techniques, such as mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and therapy, can help mitigate the impact of stress and depression on oral health.

**Education and Awareness:** Raising awareness about the links between mental health and oral health is essential for individuals to

recognize the importance of maintaining good oral hygiene, especially during times of heightened stress.

### Conclusion

In the midst of a global pandemic, oral care may not be the most obvious focus. However, its impact on depression and Burning Mouth Syndrome cannot be underestimated. The relationship between oral care, mental health, and BMS is a complex one, but it is a relationship that can be managed and improved. As we navigate the challenges presented by the pandemic, it is crucial to recognize the intricate connection between depression and Burning Mouth Syndrome. By understanding these links, healthcare providers and individuals can work together to develop strategies that promote not only mental health resilience but also the well-being of the oral cavity. A holistic approach to healthcare that addresses the mind-body connection is key to navigating these unprecedented times with a focus on comprehensive well-being.

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