Antibiotics Aren’t Necessary for Most Toothaches

In most cases dental treatment or over-the-counter painkillers work best for patients with aching teeth, experts say.

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Findings show that antibiotics are not necessarily the best medicine for toothaches. This is why a new guideline from the American Dental Association (ADA) recommends that doctors avoid prescribing these heavy-duty meds for routine cases of tooth pain, according to an ADA press release.

The ruling took place after an expert panel developed five clinical recommendations and two good practice statements advising dentists to use dental treatment or over-the-counter pain relievers instead of antibiotics, whenever appropriate, for most pulpal and periapical conditions. These oral complaints involve pain caused by inflammation affecting the nerve, blood vessels and tissue inside teeth as well as the tissues surrounding the teeth.

According to the ADA, studies show that antibiotics are known to cause serious side effects and can cause bacterial strains to become resistant to them if overused.

“When dental treatment is not immediately available and the patient has signs and symptoms such as fever, swollen lymph nodes or extreme tiredness, antibiotics may need to be prescribed,” said Peter Lockhart, DDS, who is chair of the ADA expert panel that developed the guideline and a research professor at Carolinas Medical Center—Atrium Health. “But in most cases, when adults have a toothache and access to dental treatment, antibiotics may actually do more harm than good.”

For similar coverage, read “More Than Half of Antibiotics Prescribed in Advance of Dental Procedures Aren’t Needed.”

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