



### **Can Poor Oral Care Lead to Heart Problems?**

Good oral health is not only important to your appearance and sense of well-being, but also to your overall health. Cavities and gum disease may contribute to many serious conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases, and premature and low weight babies, and has been linked to sleeping problems, as well as behavioral and developmental problems in children. Untreated cavities can also be painful and lead to serious infections. Poor oral health can also affect your ability to chew and digest food properly.

<http://worldental.org/oral-hygiene/5-steps-to-good-oral-health/>

We exercise and watch what we eat to help reduce our risk of heart attack, stroke and certain cancers. In much the same way, we should take good care of our oral (dental) health now to prevent gum disease and tooth loss later. Why is this so important? The reasons are much more than cosmetic. While we once believed the worst outcome of gum disease was tooth loss, we now know that oral health matters from head to toe.

[http://www.cdha.ca/content/oralcare\\_centre/facts\\_head\\_to\\_toe.asp](http://www.cdha.ca/content/oralcare_centre/facts_head_to_toe.asp)

For those with gum disease, the simple act of brushing the teeth or chewing gum can injure gum tissue, allowing bacteria to enter the bloodstream. It is believed that these bacteria may travel to other parts of the body, potentially worsening or causing other types of health problems. Periodontitis, or gum disease, can more than triple the risk of the person suffering from a heart attack or stroke and is also associated with diabetes. It causes an elevation in lipoproteins in the blood, with low-density lipoproteins (LDLs) contributing to atherosclerosis, or artery hardening and narrowing.

Oral health means more than just an attractive smile and pleasant breath. Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases and conditions can have a significant impact on quality of life. And in many cases, the condition of the mouth mirrors the condition of the body as a whole. For example, when your mouth is healthy, chances are your overall health is good too. On the other hand, if you have poor oral health, you may have other health problems. Recent

reports indicate a relationship between periodontal (gum) disease and stroke, heart disease, and pre-term low-birth-weight babies. Likewise, more than 90 percent of all systemic diseases have oral manifestations, meaning your dentist may be the first health care provider to diagnose a health problem.

According to the recently released Surgeon General's report on oral health in America, a large percentage of the population suffers from a reduced quality of life due to oral and facial pain. This pain is largely due to infections of the gums that support the teeth and can lead to tooth loss. More than 75 percent of the population is affected by some type of periodontal disease or gingivitis. Infections in the mouth can affect major organs. One example is bacterial endocarditis, a condition in which the lining of the heart and heart valves becomes inflamed. Poor mouth care can also contribute to oral cancer, which now takes more lives annually than cervical or skin cancer.

[http://health.yahoo.com/oralcare-overview/the-importance-of-oral-health/agd--Oral\\_Care\\_agd\\_art\\_00022761.html](http://health.yahoo.com/oralcare-overview/the-importance-of-oral-health/agd--Oral_Care_agd_art_00022761.html)

As with diabetes, the connection between poor oral health and cardiovascular conditions has been recognized — the two are often found together — but it still has not been determined conclusively whether or not there is a direct causal relationship between them. (One reason is that there are a number of other potential risk factors — such as smoking and old age — that can lead both to gum disease and heart disease.) However, in a 2005 study funded by the NIH, 1,056 randomly selected participants with no prior heart attacks or strokes were evaluated for levels of periodontal bacteria: After removing the effects of the other risk factors of age, gender, and smoking, it was found that there was an independent relationship between gum disease and heart disease, says Moise Desvarieux, MD, PhD, associate professor of epidemiology at the Mailman School and lead author of the study. One theory about why this may occur, says Dr. Desvarieux, is that small amounts of bacteria enter your bloodstream while you're chewing. "Bad" bacteria from an infected mouth may lodge itself inside blood vessels, ultimately causing dangerous blockages. Strengthening his theory is the fact that when scientists have looked at atherosclerotic blood vessels, they have sometimes found fragments of periodontal bacteria. Meanwhile, a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2007 established that aggressive treatment of gum disease reduces the incidence of atherosclerosis within six months.

Sink your teeth into this. Regular visits to your dentist are just as important for your overall health as watching your weight, exercising and eating a balanced meal. Mounting evidence shows that gum and other oral diseases are comparable to smoking, obesity and high cholesterol in the number of health problems they are linked to — including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and cancer.

[http://www.canadian-health.ca/2\\_6/26\\_e.html](http://www.canadian-health.ca/2_6/26_e.html)

By the time we reach adulthood, most of us know the consequences of not flossing are pretty tough on our teeth. Daily flossing is a vital part of dental care and promotes healthy teeth and gums. Sounds easy enough. But what if you knew that this simple daily ritual not only protects your mouth, but also may protect your heart and arteries? Suddenly, that little white string becomes more like a lifeline.

When we don't floss regularly, our teeth can really suffer. A soft, sticky, bacterial film begins to accumulate on neglected teeth, especially below the gum line. Eventually the acids in these soft, sticky plaques begin to destroy the outer enamel of teeth. Gums may become irritated and bleed. Breath may start to smell bad. And after a while, these soft, sticky plaques

will harden into crusty yellow or brown deposits—called tartar—and make it even easier for more plaque to stick and accumulate on teeth. Eventually, dental diseases that lead to tooth loss can take hold, resulting in a failing smile and possibly even diminished eating function or speech impairment.

<http://www.realage.com/DiseasePreventionCenter/Articles.aspx?aid=10401>

Men under age fifty with advanced periodontal disease were found to be 2.6 times more likely to die prematurely and 3 times more likely to die of heart disease compared to men with healthy teeth and gums.