

Gum Disease & Heart Disease

Did you know that oral health plays an important role in your overall health? Our mouths are an indicator of health – or our oral health can be a leading cause to other health conditions.

What is Gum Disease?

Gum Disease (also known as periodontal disease) is an infection of the tissues that hold your teeth in place. It's typically caused by poor brushing and flossing habits that allow plaque—a sticky film of bacteria—to build up on the teeth and harden. In advanced stages, periodontal disease can lead to sore, bleeding gums; painful chewing problems; and even tooth loss. Now, it is associated with heart disease.

How is Gum Disease related to Heart Disease?

Several studies exist to explain the link between gum disease and heart disease.

One study shows that oral bacteria can affect the heart when it enters the blood stream, attaching to fatty plaques in the heart blood vessels. The clots that form, can eventually cause Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), a thickening of the walls of the arteries around the heart due to the buildup of fatty proteins. Blood clots can obstruct normal blood flow and restrict the amount of nutrients and oxygen required for the heart to function properly, possibly leading to a heart attack. Research shows that people with gum disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from CAD as those without gum disease.

Research has also shown that diseased gums can release significantly higher levels of bacterial components, such as endotoxins, into the bloodstream of patients with severe gum disease compared to healthy patients. As a result, these harmful bacterial components in the blood could travel to other organs in the body, such as the heart, and cause harm.



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Not only are you at risk for heart disease if you have gum disease, but studies also show a link between gum disease and strokes. In one study that looked at oral infection as a risk factor for stroke, people diagnosed with Acute Cerebrovascular Ischemia were found more likely to have an oral infection when compared to those without gum disease.

Symptoms

- Lumps or lesions in the mouth or changes in color of the gums, inner cheeks or tongue
- Missing or loose teeth
- Reddish or bluish-red gums, or puffy or spongy gums can indicate disease
- Increased plaque on your teeth
- Your gums bleed during/after probing by your dentist
- Recession in your gums

Of the many risk factors for gum disease, smoking is the most significant. In fact, smoking can even jeopardize the success of treatment.

Preventing Gum Disease

Prevention is the best way to avoid getting gum disease. Daily maintenance



is required though. Everyday you should do the following:

- Floss
- Gargle with mouthwash
- Brush your teeth after every meal

Along with the daily maintenance, you should also see a dentist twice in a calendar year. And if you think gum disease may be starting, contact your dentist immediately.

Treating Gum Disease

If you already have gum disease, treatments can range from professional deep cleaning and medications to surgery.

It's recommended that periodontal health should be achieved in the least invasive and most cost-effective manner. This is often accomplished through non-surgical treatment, such as scaling and root planning. These require a careful cleaning of the root surfaces to remove plaque and tartar from deep periodontal pockets and to smooth the tooth root to remove bacterial toxins. After these procedures are performed, most patients do not require additional treatment.

Periodontal surgery is necessary when it's determined that the tissue around your teeth is unhealthy and cannot be repaired with non-surgical treatment.

Oral Health & Your Overall Health

If you value your oral as well as your overall health, a periodontal evaluation

is a good idea. Sometimes the only way to detect periodontal disease is through a periodontal evaluation. A periodontal evaluation may be especially important if you:

- Notice any symptoms of periodontal disease.
- Have heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease or osteoporosis.
- Are thinking of becoming pregnant.
- Have a family member with periodontal disease. Research suggests that the bacteria that cause periodontal disease can pass through saliva. This means the common contact of saliva in families puts children and couples at risk for contracting the periodontal disease of another family member.
- Have a sore or irritation in your mouth that does not get better within two weeks.

For more information, log onto the American Academy of Periodontology at www.perio.org.

For more information about Nationwide Better Health visit: www.nwbetterhealth.com Or contact your benefits representative.



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