



A Healthy Mouth Equals a Healthy Body

The link between periodontal disease, cardiovascular disease and other health conditions has been the topic of debate recently, with several studies backing both arguments for and against the link. Because the mouth is a pathway to the body, the evidence strongly supports that there is a link between gum disease and heart disease, according to the Academy of General Dentistry, an organization of general dentists dedicated to continuing education.

"There definitely seems to be a direct link to periodontal disease and heart disease," says Dr. William Chase, DDS, FAGD, an Academy spokesperson. "We will know more about this link as generation X grows older and more studies are done on the topic."

Periodontal disease begins with gingivitis, characterized by swollen gums that easily bleed. Without treatment the condition progresses to periodontitis, the inflammation of the tissues supporting the teeth. The theory is that bacteria present in infected gums can come loose and travel throughout the body. No research has shown how the bacteria are able to invade but it is suggested that tasks such as brushing, flossing or even chewing can do the trick.

"Periodontal disease is considered a risk factor for cardiovascular disease along with smoking, high cholesterol and hypertension," says Dr. Chase. "This link means that patients should visit a dentist regularly so that the disease or any other condition can be diagnosed and treated early."

Currently, almost one-half of Americans don't visit the dentist regularly. The link between poor oral health and diseases that can occur in the body reinforce the idea that the mouth is a window to overall health.

"Neglecting your oral health can affect your overall health," says Dr. Chase. "Pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease and poor nutrition, all have oral manifestations."

Dr. Chase suggests regular visits to the dentists along with an at-home oral health regimen that includes brushing twice daily, flossing, limiting intake of foods that cause decay, mouth rinses that destroy bacteria and communicating with the family physician and dentist.

The Academy of General Dentistry is a non-profit organization of more than 35,000 general dentists dedicated to staying up-to-date in the profession through continuing education. A general dentist is the primary care provider for patients of all ages and is responsible for the diagnosis, treatment, management and overall coordination of services related to patient's oral health needs. Learn more about AGD member dentists or find more information on dental health topics at www.agd.org/consumer.

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