

Healthy Teeth, Healthy Body

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Heart Disease and Stroke

A variety of studies have established that inflammation and bacteria in the mouth and gums can find its way into the bloodstream, leading to thickening of the arteries and increasing the risk of a heart attack; while fatty plaques that build up on the inside of the vessels can break off, go to the brain and cause a stroke.

Need further convincing? One recent study published in the *British Medical Journal* analyzed data from over 11,000 adults and determined that participants who reported brushing their teeth less frequently had a 70% increased risk of heart disease versus those who brushed twice daily. So do your heart a favor and brush up on good dental hygiene.

Diabetes

Doctors have long known that Type 2 diabetics have an increased occurrence of periodontal disease, but it turns out preventing gum infections may stave off diabetes in the first place. A recent study out of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health that followed 9,296 nondiabetic participants over 20 years found that people who had higher levels of periodontal disease had twice the risk of developing type 2 diabetes compared to those with low levels or no gum infections.

Although further research is needed to determine the exact reason, one theory proposes that serious oral infections can lead to low-grade inflammation throughout your body and that inflammation may destroy your ability to process sugar.

Respiratory Infections

Keeping your mouth clean and healthy can also help keep your lungs protected according to a recent study in the *Journal of Periodontology*. In a pool of 200 participants aged 20 to 60, researchers found that patients suffering from a respiratory illness such as pneumonia, acute bronchitis, an upper respiratory infection, or COPD had poorer periodontal health than those in the control group. The reason for this association likely lies in the bacteria caused by periodontal disease, which forms in the upper throat. From there it can easily be inhaled into the lower

respiratory tract and can obstruct breathing or develop into more serious lung-related problems.

Breast Cancer

As science continues to discover a very clear link between oral health and overall health, more and more studies are being conducted that explore different parts of the body. The latest study out of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden suggests that women may be over 11 times more likely to develop breast cancer if they have missing teeth and gum disease. Since this is one of the first studies of its kind, more research needs to be done to back up the results, but so far they seem to be on track with the current findings that poor dental hygiene can directly affect your general health.

Pregnancy Problems

If you're pregnant or thinking of getting pregnant it's more important than ever to stay on top of your oral health. Due to hormonal fluctuations and the increased blood flow throughout your body during pregnancy, you are more likely to notice changes in your teeth and gums.

According to the American Academy of Periodontists, about fifty percent of pregnant women develop gingivitis, a condition that leaves gums inflamed, bleeding, swollen, or tender. Left unchecked it can lead to periodontal disease, a serious infection that could create problems in the delivery room. While research is still being done, several studies suggest there is a direct relationship between infected bacteria in your mouth and premature deliveries, low-birth rate, and preeclampsia. To be safe, be diligent about brushing, flossing, and visiting your dentist, and make sure to alert her to any pain or problems that pop up over the nine months.
