

CONSIDERING THE LINK BETWEEN ORAL AND SYSTEMIC HEALTH

The mouth is more than just teeth—

Dental checkups are not only a way of taking good care of teeth and preventing oral health problems, but did you know more than 120 signs and symptoms of non-dental disease can now be detected through a routine oral exam?¹ In fact, many systemic diseases and conditions have oral clues that can indicate a more serious health problem. By maintaining good oral health, you can help take care of your overall health.

MOUTH

Many don't realize that the medications you may be prescribed to treat other systemic conditions could be harming your mouth in the meantime. One side effect of several medications is dry mouth. If dry mouth continues for a long period of time it can lead to difficulty tasting, chewing, swallowing and speaking, and increase your susceptibility to tooth decay and mouth infections.

PANCREAS

Recent research has found a strong correlation between periodontal (gum) disease and diabetes. In fact several studies, including one from the University of Michigan, have found that people with diabetes were much more likely to have gum disease and their condition was more advanced than those without diabetes.² Gum disease in diabetics may also make it more difficult for them to control their blood sugar, making the body more resistant to the insulin produced by the pancreas.

BONES

Osteoporosis can have a serious effect on the mouth and teeth. It can affect the density of the jaw bone which anchors the teeth in place. If the jaw bone becomes weakened or fractured, tooth loss can occur.³

1 Little, James W., Falace, Donald A., Miller, Craig S., & Rhodus, Nelson L. (2008). *Dental Management of the Medically Compromised Patient* (7th ed.). St. Louis, MO: Mosby Elsevier.

2 The research for this Report was generously supported with funding from Delta Dental Plans Association and performed by the University of Michigan by George W. Taylor, Wenche S. Borgnakke, Patricia F. Anderson, and M. Carol Shannon. ©DDPA 2009.

3 American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.osteoporosis.htm>, accessed June 2012.

4 <http://stroke.ahajournals.org/content/35/2/496.full#content-block>

5 University of Rochester Medical Center, <http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/news/story/index.cfm?id=3240>, accessed September 2011.

6 Delta Dental's Research and Data Institute.

7 American Dental Association, <http://www.ada.org/2730.aspx>, accessed June 2011.

8 American Dental Association, <http://www.ada.org/3019.aspx?currentTab=1>, accessed June 2012.



BRAIN

Subjects with severe periodontitis (gum disease) in a German study had a risk level 4.3 times higher for cerebral ischemia stroke than subjects with mild or no periodontitis.⁴

HEART

A recent study by the University of Rochester's Center for Oral Biology explains how specific bacteria present in the mouth can migrate into the bloodstream and lodge in heart tissue.⁵ Infective endocarditis has one of the highest morbidity rates and is one of the most costly diseases, with about 20 percent of those diagnosed dying from the disease, and many requiring an artificial or other heart transplant.⁶ It is important for those with high-risk medical conditions to keep the bacteria in their mouths as low as possible to help prevent infection in the heart.

REPRODUCTIVE TRACT

Dental care is important for a woman's overall health, but it is an even bigger priority for women who are pregnant or about to become pregnant. Taking care of your dental health early in the pregnancy may help support healthy development of your baby and can help ensure a healthy birth. According to the American Dental Association, studies show that gum disease may be a significant risk factor for pre-term, low-birthweight babies.⁷ Other major risks from poor dental care during pregnancy include gingivitis or "pregnancy tumors" on the gums.⁸