

Bigger Reasons why Dental Hygiene is so Important

Most of us are aware that poor dental hygiene can lead to tooth decay, gum disease and bad breath, but not brushing your teeth could also have consequences for more serious illnesses. Many people have the belief that oral health is completely separate from general health in the rest of the body. This could not be further from the truth. October is National Dental Hygiene month so discussing the importance of proper dental hygiene is not only timely, but many people are unaware of certain health conditions that are affected by poor dental health.

Alzheimer's disease

In 2010, researchers from New York University (NYU) concluded that there is a link between gum inflammation and Alzheimer's disease, after reviewing 20 years of data on the association. The study spanned a



Dentally Speaking
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20-year period and ended in 1984, when the subjects were all over the age of 70. Comparing cognitive function at ages 50 and 70, the NYU team found that gum disease at the age of 70 was strongly associated with low scores for cognitive function. **Study participants were nine times**

more likely to have a score in the lower range of the cognitive test if they had inflammation of the gums.

In 2013, UK-based researchers built on the findings of this study, by comparing brain samples from 10 living patients with Alzheimer's with 10 brain samples from people who did not have the disease. Analysis showed that bacteria was present in the Alzheimer's brain samples but not in the samples from the brains of people who did not have Alzheimer's. The bacteria found, *P. gingivalis*, is usually associated with chronic gum disease.

The team followed up this research in 2014 with a new study, the results of which were published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*. In this study, Dr. Singharo says that there is sufficient scientific evidence to show that two of the three gum disease-causing bacteria have been consistently found in brain tissue. In a patient who has bleeding gum, this bacteria will enter the blood stream every time they clean their mouth and even when they eat food. Therefore, addressing periodontal disease with professional dental cleanings is essential if a person wants to achieve proper oral health.

Pancreatic cancer

Another very serious health condition that has been associated with periodontal disease is pancreatic cancer. A research team from Harvard School of Public Health were the first to report strong evidence on a link between gum disease and pancreatic cancer back in 2007.

Researchers are unable to prove whether the periodontitis bacteria are a cause or result of pancreatic cancer - current research can only prove that the two are linked. The type of gum inflammation associated with pancreatic cancer in the study was periodontitis, which affects the tissue that support the teeth and can cause loss of bone around the base of the teeth. The other main kind of gum disease - gingivitis; where the tissue around the teeth becomes inflamed - was not linked to increased cancer risk. Gingivitis happens when bacteria in the plaque around the base of the teeth build up due to bad dental hygiene. However, gingivitis can lead to periodontitis if persistent. The Harvard researchers found that **men with a history of gum disease had a 64% increased risk of pancreatic cancer compared with men who had never had gum disease.**

Heart disease

Perhaps the most established is the association between dental hygiene and heart disease. Researchers have shown that heart disease risk increased because people with bleeding gums have bacteria in the mouth that enters the bloodstream and stick to platelets. This bacteria can then form blood clots, interrupting the flow of blood to the heart and triggering a heart attack. The mouth is probably the dirtiest place in the human

body. We have up to 700 different types of bacteria co-existing in our mouths! Prof. Howard Jenkinson, from the University of Bristol, states that **"Cardiovascular disease is currently the biggest killer in the western world. Oral bacteria are common infecting agents, and we now recognize that bacterial infections are an independent risk factor for heart diseases.**

Although some of the associations mentioned in this article are still under investigation, good dental hygiene remains important for lowering the risk of many conditions. The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) recommend that we should brush for 2 minutes, twice daily. The ADHA guidelines also stress the importance of flossing daily and rinsing with mouthwash. Making this your daily routine will not only lead to optimal oral health, but also improve your overall health.

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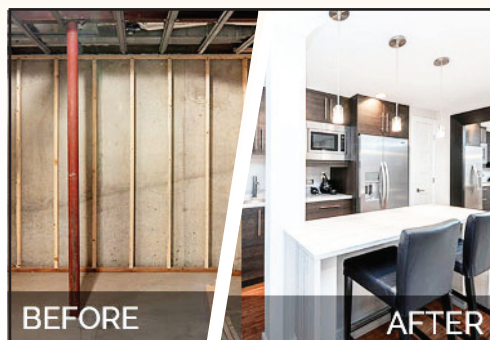
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