

A healthy body starts with a healthy mouth

It's an unfortunate consequence of having a separate doctor to work on your mouth from the rest of your body. It makes people think that oral health is somehow separate from (and maybe less important

than) the health of the rest of the body. And when money, time or interest are in demand elsewhere, people think that visiting the dentist for a checkup or cleaning is the first thing to cut from their schedule.

But your oral health can dramatically impact the health of your entire body... but how does this happen? There are actually multiple key pathways that cause oral health to contribute to your overall health.

Your Mouth is the Gateway to your Body

Pretty much everything that enters your body goes through your mouth. If you're breathing through your mouth, oral bacteria can be picked up and carried into the throat and even the lungs. Even when you're breathing through your nose, the air passes by the mouth, and can pick up oral bacteria.

Your mouth is even linked to your blood vessels through the gums. Bleeding gums allow oral bacteria to enter your bloodstream, and they can travel to your heart and the blood vessels near the heart. Oral bacteria make up a significant portion of arterial plaque that can stop blood flow to the heart or break off and stop blood flowing to the brain (stroke).

Inflammation in the Body

But it isn't just the bacteria that cause problems for your health. It's also your body's immune response.

When your body senses infection, it responds by releasing many chemical triggers that activate your immune response, also known as an inflammatory response. It can cause swelling, but it has many other effects. Systemic inflammation has been linked with metabolic disorders, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and autoimmune disorders, among other serious health conditions. As long as your gums remain chronically infected with gum disease, your body will continue its elevated immune response, with serious consequences for your health.

The Critical Roles of Your Jaw

Your jaw plays a vital role in preserving your overall health. The position of your jaw defines your airway, so it's capable of either restricting your ability to breathe or helping you get the air you need. If your jaw is poorly positioned, you may experience snoring or

sleep apnea, in which your breathing stops at night. This stresses your heart and keeps you from getting restful sleep.

In addition, a poorly positioned jaw can contribute to TMJ (temporomandibular joint disorder, also called TMD).

TMJ can cause many symptoms in the head and face, including jaw pain, headaches, migraines, tinnitus and vertigo. But it can also cause symptoms in the neck and back.

The muscles of your jaw also help stabilize your neck. If your jaw is out of balance, your neck may soon be out of balance as well,

which can cause problems with your spine.

Nutrition

And, of course, if you can't chew properly, it can limit your ability to eat a full variety of healthy foods. The majority of nutritious food choices require a stable bite and overall healthy dentition to comfortably eat. The fact is that most people with poor oral health are "forced" to eat extremely unhealthy processed food (because they are softer) due to their limitations. With inadequate nutrition, you're more vulnerable to a wide range of health conditions. Poor oral health can limit your nutrition, so it's important to make sure your teeth and gums remain healthy and fit for eating.

If you are someone who values their health, remember that proper oral health is an integral part of overall wellness for your body.

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Dentally Speaking by Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S.



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