



# What Your

There are many connections between oral health and overall health. Often, dentists will be the first practitioners to notice signs of diseases affecting the rest of the body. The oral-systemic connection has been observed to affect patients with ailments resulting from heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, organ transplants, Down syndrome, cancer, pregnancy and bacterial pneumonia.

The correlation stems from the affect of periodontal disease, also known as dental disease, on the rest of the body. The bacterial infection damages the gums and bone that hold teeth in place. The main cause of periodontal disease is plaque, but it can easily be treated with proper brushing and flossing daily, as well as regular dental check-ups.

In all cases, it is very important to talk openly and honestly with your dentist about all aspects of your medical history, including illnesses, chronic conditions and regular prescription and over-the-counter medications. With an accurate and complete health history, you and your dentist can develop a treatment and care plan that will maintain optimal oral health for you.

## Oral Health and Your Heart

Dental health affects the cardiovascular system on many levels. Oral cavities provide diseases with a direct access point to the blood stream, thereby reaching the heart.

One recent study published in the American Academy of Periodontology's (AAP) *Journal of Periodontology* found periodontal bacteria in the arteries of 9 out of 15 patients with coronary artery disease. However, the AAP has also stated, as a result of a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, that periodontal treatment may improve the condition of arteries, thereby alleviating some health risks.

To prevent the risk of infections of the inner lining of the heart (infective endocarditis), the American Heart Association previously recommended that patients with

# Mouth Says About Your Body

certain heart conditions take antibiotics shortly before dental treatment. However, the association recently stated that most of these patients no longer need short-term antibiotics as a preventive measure before their dental treatment, making it even easier for heart patients to obtain dental care.

## Your Mouth's Affect on Diabetes

Oral health and nutrition go hand in hand, which is why diabetes patients benefit so much from regular dental care.

Properly maintaining diabetes is very important, as poorly controlled type 2 diabetic patients were found more likely to develop periodontal disease than well-controlled diabetics in an AAP study.

Another study found that periodontal treatment may improve a diabetic patient's blood count reading by as much as 20 percent, further proving the importance of regular dental care. Patients with well-controlled diabetes often can receive dental care in similar ways to non-diabetic patients. However, patients with diabetes often do have special needs.

If you have diabetes, talk to your dentist about your care and treatment.

## Correlation Between Joints and Teeth

More than 46 million Americans suffer from arthritis, but do they all know they are at risk for periodontal disease?

In a recent AAP study of 130 people, the 65 people who had rheumatoid arthritis were more than twice as likely to have periodontal disease. In addition, the arthritis sufferers averaged 11.6 missing teeth, compared to

6.7 in the control group.

Proper dental care is extremely important to reduce the risk of oral ailments suffered with joint disorders.

## Can Oral Infections Affect Organ Transplants?

Researchers from the University of Connecticut Health Center found a relationship between dental disease and inflammation in solid-organ-transplant recipients.

Inflammation is well known to increase the chance of organ transplant rejection. Patients at risk for inflammation can be identified by the presence of a blood protein (serum interleukin-6).

The study found that patients who had chronic periodontitis had higher levels of the protein in their blood, establishing that the dental disease increases the chance of organ rejection.

## Pregnancy Complications

Good oral health habits not only help prevent oral problems during pregnancy, but also positively affect the health of your unborn child.

Your baby's teeth begin to grow between the third and sixth months of pregnancy. To nourish this development, it is important to eat a well-balanced diet that is especially rich in calcium, protein, phosphorous, and vitamins A, C and D.

In addition, due to hormones, gingivitis can be common in mothers during the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> months of pregnancy. Your dentist may recommend more frequent cleanings during this time to help you avoid problems.

Sometimes, overgrowths of gum tissue called "pregnancy tumors" can appear on gums during the second trimester. The red, raw-looking mulber-


ry-like growths can be found between teeth and are caused by plaque. The "tumors" often are surgically removed after the baby is born. If you experience pregnancy tumors, see your dentist.

Studies indicate that pregnant women with severe periodontal disease may be at increased risk for pre-term delivery, which in turn increases the risk of having a low-birth weight baby. To help prevent dental disease, brush and floss properly and attend regular dental appointments.

## Cancer

Smoking and alcohol-use increase the risk of dental disease and oral cancer. In addition, sun exposure increases the risk of lip cancer. However, more than 25 percent of oral cancers occur in people who do not smoke and have no other risk factors.

Oral cancer often starts as a tiny, unnoticeable white or red spot or sore on the lips, gum tissue, cheek lining, tongue and the hard or soft palate. Other signs include a sore that bleeds easily or does not heal, a color change in the gums, a lump, a small eroded area, tenderness, difficulty moving the jaw or a change in the way the teeth fit together

Currently, only half of all patients diagnosed with oral cancer survive more than five years, but your dentist has the skills and tools to ensure that early signs of cancer and pre-cancerous conditions are identified. 

*This story includes information compiled from the American Dental Association and AAP. For more information, visit [www.floridadental.org](http://www.floridadental.org), [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org) or [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org).*