

Oral Care and Whole Body Health

Did you know that good oral health care may have even more value than preserving your smile? Did you know that researchers are continuing to find associations between cavities, gum disease, and heart disease?¹ Or that there are some diseases that are associated with an increased risk of infections – such as diabetes, which increases the risks of gum inflammation and infections?² Or that loose teeth can be a warning sign for osteoporosis?³

In recent years, a growing number of oral health professionals including orthodontists and dentists agree there are links between the health of your mouth and the overall health of your body. Like all health science, the subject can be complex. But, in its simplest form, the message is that good oral health is an important factor in whole body health.

Every one of us has millions of oral bacteria naturally occurring in our mouths. The bacteria are part of the substance called “plaque,” which forms constantly on teeth. Oral bacteria can reach unhealthy levels if plaque is not removed daily by brushing and flossing. An overabundance of plaque can lead to gum (periodontal) disease. Researchers also believe overall health risks may arise when bacteria in the mouth reach advanced levels and move into other parts of the body. Some of the findings, so far, make a very strong case. A number of studies have found that blood sugar levels in diabetics with periodontal disease were significantly reduced when the patients’ gum disease was treated.⁴ A study done by the American Society of Microbiology identified genes in certain oral bacteria that allow the organisms to invade and infect human arterial cells, weakening the walls of the heart. Other medical scientists are concerned that excessive oral inflammation can contribute to clogged arteries.

Studies also show that osteoporosis, a disease that causes the bones to become less dense over time as the body loses calcium, could be at the root of some tooth loss.⁵ Though more research is needed to establish a link, osteoporosis and gum disease have been shown to cause significant tooth loss. One study shows that the risk of tooth loss is three times greater for women with osteoporosis than for women who do not have the disease.⁶

Be sure to talk about whole body health with your orthodontist during your next visit.

¹ Journal of the New Jersey Dental Association; Study by David Goteiner, DDS, FACD, FICD; Morristown Memorial Hospital (2007)

² *Connections*, Vol. 1, No. 2; Study supported by an educational grant from The Colgate-Palmolive Company; Dr. Louis Rose (2005)

³ Journal of Periodontology Vol. 78, No. 6; Study by Dr. Renee M. Brennan; University at Buffalo (June 2007)

⁴ Journal of the New Jersey Dental Association; Study by David Goteiner, DDS, FACD, FICD; Morristown Memorial Hospital (2007)

⁵ Journal of Periodontology Vol. 78, No. 6; Study by Dr. Renee M. Brennan; University at Buffalo (June 2007)

⁶ National Institutes of Health (NIH) Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases National Resource Center