

Reduce cardiovascular disease - look after gums

Research published in the British Medical Journal has shown that people who never or rarely brush their teeth are 70% more likely to develop cardiovascular disease than those who brush twice a day. While the link between oral health and heart disease is still inconclusive, experts do agree that there are plausible reasons why dental health and heart health may be connected.



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It is widely believed that there is a connection between blood clots in the heart and gum disease due to the build-up of fatty deposits on the lining of the artery walls. It has also been suggested that bacteria found in the gaps around the teeth can pass into the bloodstream. These react with plaque build-up in the arteries, affecting the heart. Gum disease doesn't just signal inflammation, it also increases inflammation and, interestingly, the same bacteria that colonize our gums have been found in arterial-wall plaque.

So can preventing periodontal disease with brushing and flossing prevent heart disease. The evidence is not clear yet, but it is intriguing. According to the American Academy of Periodontology, people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to have coronary artery disease. Studies found that the presence of common problems in the mouth, including gum disease (gingivitis), cavities and missing teeth, were as good at predicting heart disease as cholesterol levels.

Jeremy Yatt of Fedhealth says the reality is that heart disease can be hard to catch early, because many of the conditions that precede it may have no symptoms. "You won't ever feel your arteries hardening or your cholesterol rising but you might notice bleeding or painful gums.

"It is important for people worried about heart disease to pay attention to the established risk factors. People should not think that if they just started to brush their teeth more they could go back to smoking or ignore their diabetes. If you are at risk of heart disease, you need to make some lifestyle changes. Lose weight if you're overweight; eat healthy foods; exercise regularly and control any conditions that increase risk, such as diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure."

Gum disease warnings

Gum disease often goes unnoticed. Warning signs that you may have gum disease include:

- Red, tender, swollen gums.
- Bleeding gums while brushing or flossing.
- Gums that seem to be pulling from your teeth.
- Chronic bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth.
- Teeth that are loose or separating from each other.

"While regular dental exams and cleanings are important, you can play a major role in preventing gum disease every day. The best way to be proactive in maintaining your oral and overall health is by going for regular check-ups, getting professional cleanings and regular brushing and flossing.

"Taking care of your oral health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, all contribute to a healthy heart and mouth," concludes Yatt.

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