



Oral Health and Heart Disease

Understanding the Connection Between Your Mouth and Overall Health

Why Oral Health Matters Beyond Your Teeth

Oral health is closely connected to overall health. Researchers have found that certain oral diseases—particularly **gum disease (periodontitis)**—may be associated with several chronic medical conditions, including cardiovascular disease.

Although scientists continue to study these relationships, maintaining healthy teeth and gums is an important part of supporting overall well-being.

What Is Gum Disease?

Gum disease is a chronic inflammatory condition caused by bacteria that accumulate in dental plaque.

If left untreated, it may lead to:

- Bleeding gums
- Bone loss
- Loose teeth
- Tooth loss

Chronic inflammation from gum disease may also affect other parts of the body.

How Might Oral Health Affect the Heart?

Researchers believe several mechanisms may contribute.

Chronic Inflammation

Gum disease produces ongoing inflammation.

Scientists are investigating whether chronic inflammation may contribute to conditions affecting blood vessels and the cardiovascular system.

Oral Bacteria

Everyday activities such as brushing, flossing, or chewing can occasionally allow small numbers of oral bacteria to enter the bloodstream.

In healthy individuals, the immune system usually clears these bacteria quickly.

Researchers continue to study how oral bacteria may influence cardiovascular health in certain people.

What Does the Research Show?

Studies have found that people with severe periodontal disease are more likely to have cardiovascular disease than those with healthy gums.

However:

An association does not prove that gum disease causes heart disease.

Many shared risk factors contribute to both conditions, including:

- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Aging
- Poor diet
- Obesity

Researchers continue to investigate the relationship.

Can Treating Gum Disease Prevent Heart Disease?

At present, there is **no conclusive evidence** that treating gum disease directly prevents heart attacks or strokes.

However, treating periodontal disease:

- Improves oral health
- Reduces inflammation in the mouth
- Helps preserve teeth

Maintaining good oral health remains an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

Heart Conditions and Dental Care

Some people with certain heart conditions may require special precautions before specific dental procedures.

These situations are uncommon and may include individuals at high risk for **infective endocarditis**.

If you have:

- Certain artificial heart valves
- A history of infective endocarditis
- Some congenital heart conditions

your dentist and physician may recommend preventive antibiotics before selected dental procedures.

Most patients **do not** require antibiotics before routine dental treatment.

How to Protect Your Oral and Overall Health

Healthy habits benefit both your mouth and your body.

Recommendations include:

- Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth every day.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Avoid tobacco products.
- Manage diabetes if present.
- Exercise regularly.
- Visit your dentist for routine examinations and professional cleanings.

Common Myths

"Gum disease causes heart attacks."

False.

Current research shows an **association**, but it has not established a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

"Healthy gums are only important for your teeth."

False.

Healthy gums contribute to overall health and quality of life.

"I only need to see a dentist if my teeth hurt."

False.

Many oral diseases develop without pain.

Regular preventive care helps detect problems early.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Oral health is an important part of overall health.
- ✓ Gum disease has been associated with cardiovascular disease, although a direct cause-and-effect relationship has not been established.
- ✓ Chronic inflammation is one possible biological connection under investigation.
- ✓ Good oral hygiene supports both oral health and general well-being.
- ✓ Regular dental visits remain an important part of preventive healthcare.

References

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