

FURTHER CONNECTIONS FOUND LINKING ORAL HEALTH TO OVERALL HEALTH

Opening your mouth and saying “aaah” may lead to more than a dental cleaning, tooth filling or whiter smile. Alert dentists detect many links between your oral health and general health because the mouth is one of the first places diseases manifests. Conversely, mouth infections such as periodontitis can cause problems throughout the body, so controlling them is critical.



Scientifically, establishing links between oral health and serious medical conditions is difficult but necessary. Such links would incentivize insurers to add dental benefits because proper dental care would bring cost savings for other health for other health problems. But providing such connections involves sorting out complex issues. For example, research shows that patients with periodontal disease are at increased risk for heart attack, stroke, diabetes, premature birth, HIV/AIDS and other conditions. However, lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, poor eating habits, obesity, lack of exercise and socioeconomic status are linked to both oral and systematic diseases.

Researchers from, the Mayo Clinic, World Health Organization, and the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, has documented links between oral health and the following conditions:

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE – Including arterial plaque and stroke – this top killer of both men and women globally has a complicated relationship with oral health. Some studies report a moderate link between periodontal disease while others don't, and some researchers identify the two as having common casual factors such as smoking and obesity. Most evidence points to a 1.5-2 fold greater risk of a fatal heart attack for patients with periodontal disease.

PREMATURE BIRTH AND LOW BIRTH WEIGHT – Are strongly linked to periodontal disease. Pregnant women with this disease are three to eight times as likely to have low birth weight babies and other prenatal complications than those with healthy mouths. Additionally, the metabolic and hormonal changes associated with pregnancy can be mitigated with proper oral hygiene.

DIABETES – Has a two-way relationship with oral health since it increases the risk of gum disease, cavities, tooth loss, and oral infections. Periodontal disease is often called the sixth complication of diabetes because of its high prevalence and its tendency to make glycemic control more difficult.

RESPIRATORY DISEASE – Dental plaque acts as a reservoir of potential respiratory problems in high risk patients such as diabetics, alcoholics and hospital patient with compromised immune systems and swallowing reflexes. Better oral hygiene has been shown to improve respiratory outcomes in these patients.

HIV/AIDS – Oral problems including mouth ulcers, dry mouth and mucosal lesions are common. Fungal, viral or bacterial infections attack the gums and are often one of the first signs of AIDS. Managing oral infections in these immuno-suppressed patients is critical.

OSTEOPOROSIS – The mouth can be the first site of systemic bone density loss because the bone supporting the jaw becomes susceptible to infection destruction. Routine dental exams and dental x-rays help this track bone loss.

CANCER – Chemotherapy and radiation often bring on oral complications such as oral Mucositis, radiation-induced dental cavities, and even jawbone necrosis, making oral hygiene critical for cancer patients because of their compromised immune systems.