



Dental

Take care of your mouth for better overall health



When your dentist looks in your mouth, he or she can see more than your teeth and gums. Dentists can see signs of disease in other parts of your body.¹ Did you know that infections in your mouth can cause other health problems? That's why taking care of your mouth and regularly visiting your dentist is so important.

Gum disease and your health.

Your dentist may refer to gum disease as “periodontitis.” There are possible links between gum disease and other serious illnesses.² These conditions include:

- **Diabetes:** The majority of people with diabetes also have gum disease. Diabetes lowers resistance to infections and delays healing, for example from a cut, sore or infection. As a result, people with poorly controlled diabetes have more dental problems and are more likely to lose teeth. If it is not treated, gum disease can make it hard to control blood sugar levels.^{3,4}
- **Heart disease:** Gum disease is associated with heart disease. Gum disease can cause inflammation (swelling), which is the body's reaction to infection or injury.^{5,6} Inflammation may help cause heart disease. Heart patients with gum disease should treat their gum disease as part of their overall heart health.
- **Respiratory conditions (lung problems):** Gum disease has been associated with lung problems such as COPD. Gum disease bacteria in your lungs can make other breathing conditions like pneumonia (lung infection) worse.⁷

You should know:

- Your mouth reflects your overall health.
- Your dentist may detect health problems based on the health of your teeth and gums.
- Some diseases are made worse by gum disease.
- Bad breath can be solved once you identify the cause.

- **Pregnancy complications:** Gum disease in pregnant women is associated with pregnancy complications. It's important to know that receiving care from a dentist is safe during pregnancy. It is important for both the health of the mom and the baby.⁸
After delivery, germs in the mouth can be passed on to the baby through shared spoons and kisses. This can lead to early tooth decay in the child.
- **Rheumatoid arthritis (joint swelling):** Patients with rheumatoid arthritis are much more likely to have gum disease. Treating gum disease may bring some relief from arthritis symptoms.⁹

Other health problems your dentist can spot.

- **Risk of stroke:** Dental X-rays can show blockages in the head and neck arteries, which can lead to stroke.
- **Oral cancer:** Dental exams normally include a screening for mouth cancer. Exams can show tumors or sores in the mouth.
- **Eating disorders:** Dentists can spot eating disorders by redness in the mouth and thin tooth enamel.
- **Oral thrush:** Oral thrush is a yeast infection. It leaves a white coating on the tongue and throat.
- **Anemia:** Anemia is a condition in which you don't have enough healthy red blood cells. Signs of anemia include pale gums, a red, burning tongue and irritation at the corners of the mouth.
- **HIV:** HIV is a virus spread through body fluids. Symptoms include mouth sores, patches on the sides of the tongue and a white tongue.

Better oral health can lead to better overall health.

Healthy teeth and gums are linked to better overall health. Brush, floss and visit the dentist regularly. You'll enjoy a healthier mouth. And a healthier mouth plays a role in your overall health.



¹ Mayo Clinic, "Oral health: A window to your overall health," <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/dental/DE00001>, February 5, 2011.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Oral health: Preventing cavities, gum disease, tooth loss and oral cancers," <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/doh.htm>, July 29, 2011.

³ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, "Periodontal (Gum) Disease: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatments," <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/GumDiseases/PeriodontalGumDisease.htm>, NIH Publication No. 11-1142, July 2011, no copyright.

⁴ American Academy of Periodontology, "Gum Disease and Diabetes," <http://www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.diabetes.htm>, last modified February 23, 2011.

⁵ American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.heart.htm>, last modified February 23, 2011.

⁶ Lockhart PB, et al. Periodontal Disease and Atherosclerotic Vascular Disease: Does the Evidence Support an Independent Association? *Circulation*, published online April 18, 2012, <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/early/2012/04/18/CIR.0b013e31825719f3>.

⁷ American Academy of Periodontology, "Gum Disease and Respiratory Diseases," <http://www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.respiratory.htm>, last modified February 23, 2011.

⁸ California Dental Association Foundation, "Oral Health During Pregnancy and Early Childhood: Evidence Based Science" *CDA Journal*, vol 38, no6, pgs 405-426.

⁹ Johns Hopkins Medicine Health Alerts, "What's the Link Between Rheumatoid Arthritis and Cancer?," <http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/reports/arthritis/3308-1.html>, November 30, 2009.

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