



Gum Disease, Heart Disease

According to an article in USA Today, studies have found that the incidence of heart disease is about twice as high in people with periodontal (gum) disease. This link has been evident for a while now, but now we know the reason. And I probably don't need to tell you that heart disease is the number one killer in America.

Studies now indicate that the most common strain of bacteria found in dental plaque may cause blood clots. When a blood clot breaks loose and escapes into the blood stream, it could cause a heart attack or stroke. Also, chronic inflammation of the gums, as seen in gingivitis and periodontitis, could be involved in the inflammation of the lining of the blood vessels, leading to the buildup of plaque in the arteries. So dental plaque could be yielding arterial plaque.

So how prevalent is gum disease? Over half of all people over the age of 18 have at least some form of gum disease. Even worse, after the age of 35, three out of four people are affected by it. This disease may increase one's risk of several health concerns including a weakened immune system, diabetes, stroke, lung disease, respiratory disease, osteoporosis, gastric ulcers, and pre-term low birth weight babies.

To reduce the risk of these diseases linked to dental bacteria one simply needs to follow the advice the dental community has always advocated: brush adequately two to three times daily, floss daily, and see the dentist for regular professional cleanings. In addition, some people will need specialized care to improve their periodontal health. If you have gums that bleed when you brush or floss; gums that are red, swollen or tender; gums that are pulled away from your teeth; teeth that are loose or separating; or persistent bad breath you may have periodontal disease. The best prognosis for periodontal disease (and overall health) is seen when treatment is started early. Someone diagnosed with or at risk for heart disease, aside from seeing their dentist, should also seek medical care for their condition.

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