

Oral Health and Your Heart
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The health of the mouth and the overall health of the body are seen by some to be unrelated. But since all the parts of the body are connected by the circulatory system it only makes sense that illness in one area can affect the health of the rest of the body. A growing body of evidence from research in the last fifteen years shows that oral health, or the lack of it, can have serious effects on the body's overall health.

One of the biggest areas of concern in this area is the affect that oral health has on the heart, since it is essential to life. Something that is getting a lot of attention these days is the relationship between gum disease and cardiovascular disease. Gum disease, also known as periodontitis, is a bacterially induced chronic inflammatory disease that can be associated with increased systemic inflammation. One study showed an increased prevalence of coronary artery disease in patients with periodontitis, while others show that the incidence of cardiovascular events is increased in the presence of chronic inflammatory conditions including periodontitis. In addition, the same species of bacteria that are found in the diseased gum pockets around the teeth can be found in the atherosclerotic plaques within the circulatory system. Subjects in one study that had higher levels of a specific bacteria associated with periodontal disease also had an increase in the thickness of their carotid artery wall.

While no clear evidence can yet establish a causative role between gum disease and cardiovascular disease, the relationship is important enough that a report on clinical recommendations was published simultaneously in the Journal of Periodontology and the American Journal of Cardiology. These were aimed at reducing the potential risk of cardiovascular events for patients with periodontal disease, and to bring awareness of the need to screen for periodontitis and provide optimal treatment in those patients with cardiovascular disease. Further evidence for the need to be aware of this relationship is seen in the results of a 1999-2002 study of 40,000 people that showed a progressive association between tooth loss and heart disease, since gum disease is the most common cause of tooth loss.

The relationship between gum disease and cardiovascular disease is getting clearer everyday. The good news is that, since gum disease is both preventable and treatable, you can have a significant impact on your cardiovascular health by taking care of your oral health. If you would like more information on this topic ask your dentist, or call my office at 724-537-5505 to set up a FREE screening appointment for periodontal disease. Thank you for taking the time to read this article, and have a great day.