



Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

by Dr. Mary Jane Hanlon

The Importance of Oral Health

Oral health means more than just an attractive smile. Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases and conditions can have a significant impact on quality of life. In many cases, the condition of the mouth mirrors the condition of the body as a whole. Recent reports indicate a relationship between periodontal (gum) disease and stroke, heart disease, and pre-term low-birth-weight babies. Likewise, more than 90 percent of all systemic diseases have oral manifestations, meaning your dentist may be the first health care provider to diagnose a health problem. According to the recently released Surgeon General's report on oral health in America, a large percentage of the population suffers from a reduced quality of life due to oral and facial pain. This pain is largely due to infections of the gums that support the teeth and can lead to tooth loss. Some type of periodontal disease or gingivitis affects more than 75 percent of the population.

Recent reports show that infections in the mouth can affect major organs. One example is bacterial endocarditis, a condition in which the lining of the heart and heart valves become inflamed. Poor mouth care can also contribute to oral cancer, which now takes more lives annually than cervical and skin cancer.

In addition, poor oral health affects the digestive process, which begins with physical and chemical activities in the mouth. Problems

can lead to intestinal failure, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and other problems.

Mouth tissues reflect symptoms of other problems. In addition, many diseases can be diagnosed in their early stages through an oral examination. Swollen gums, mouth ulcers, dry mouth and/or excessive gum problems may characterize these diseases. Some of these diseases include diabetes, leukemia, cancer, heart disease and kidney disease.

A regular exam allows your dentist to keep your mouth in tip-top shape and watch for developments that may point to problems elsewhere in your body. A dental exam also helps to pick up on poor nutrition and hygiene, growth and development problems and improper jaw alignment.

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Custance Place
76 Bedford St.
Suite #9
Lexington

Tel: 781-860-0115



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