



Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

by Dr. Mary Jane Hanlon

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

Researchers are finding possible links between periodontal infections and other diseases throughout the body. Current studies suggest that there may be a link between periodontal (gum) disease, heart disease and other health conditions. In fact, research suggests that gum disease may be a more serious risk factor for heart disease than hypertension, smoking, cholesterol, gender and age. New studies suggest that people who have gum disease may be at a higher risk for heart attacks, although no one is certain how this relationship works. Your oral health affects your overall health, but the studies that will find exactly why these problems are linked are still underway.

The current theory is that bacteria present in infected gums can come loose and move throughout the body. The same bacteria that cause gum disease and irritate your gums might travel to your arteries. Researchers are unsure what causes the bacteria to become mobile, but it has been suggested that bacteria can be dislodged and enter the bloodstream during tasks as simple as brushing, flossing, or even chewing.

Research shows that risk varies according to the level of gum infection. The worse the infection, the more likely the bacteria are to become blood-borne. Infected gums bleed, making it easier for bacteria to enter the bloodstream. If bacteria become dislodged, the bacteria enter through cuts or sores in your mouth and travel to other parts of the body through your bloodstream. Once bacteria reaches the arteries, they

can irritate them in the same way that they irritate the gum tissue. This could cause arterial plaque to accumulate in the arteries, which can cause hardening and block blood-flow to your heart can cause a heart attack. Also, arterial plaque can come loose and travel to other parts of the body. If blockage occurs in the brain it can cause a stroke. Your dentist may use a special rinse immediately after dental procedures to neutralize these bacteria, but your best protection is to maintain a healthy mouth.

Always remember that gum disease is caused by plaque build-up. Brush and floss regularly to remove plaque that you can't see below the gumline and remember to schedule regular check-ups. If you remove the plaque, you minimize the chance for getting gum disease. If you have any questions about your oral health, ask your dentist.

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