

## "Just a Little Blood When I Brush . . ."

by Wm. J. Schlotz, D.D.S.



As a practicing dentist, I have to admit I've heard this so often that its effect can be numbing (excuse the phrasing). Fortunately, my blessed of blessed dental hygienists, Missy Meyer, doesn't let me, much less our patients, escape that easily from such an important *and telling* synopsis of gum health. She immediately and fervently uses such casually oriented symptom-speak as an opportunity for education while employing the softest of velvet hammer styles. She truly is a gifted teacher and orator and yes, I've thanked each and every one of my lucky stars (numerous times) for her presence in my office.

Although her informative message is as clear as it is sweet for the patient's ears, I also hear her DDS-directed and more cryptic memo loudly and quite clearly. "Let's not downplay such an important topic as gum health. The issue is not solely about teeth (or their loss) anymore, it's about *whole body health*."

As discussed in my last article (archived -TheConservativeDentist.com), gum disease is now understood to have seriously malicious systemic health effects. For example, today's research suggests that gum disease may be a *more serious risk factor* for heart disease than hypertension, smoking and cholesterol. Other diseases such as stroke, diabetes and Alzheimer's carry a similar association with unhealthy gums. Why so? Gum disease is actually a bacterial *infection* of the gums. Current theory has it that these bacteria become dislodged and enter the bloodstream during tasks as simple as brushing, flossing or even chewing. They travel randomly until they stop. Their ultimate destination in the body then, along with the individual's susceptibility, determines the type of the impending disease.

The *good news*...Symptoms of gum disease are as obvious as the reddish bristled ends of a used toothbrush or a tinged piece of floss. The *bad news*...70% of the adult population is afflicted, yet most sees no evil. For far too many people, the blood that emanates from gum tissue is tolerated, if not even *expected*. Would they feel the same way about blood oozing out of any other part of the body?

Gum disease is serious and I'm passing the word. Prevention is the best medicine, of course. For those already afflicted, see my next article for today's exciting treatment advances. See Missy, I *have* been paying attention. And now, likely, so are "The Call" readers. You're always wearing a smile. It's a bit bigger now, isn't it?

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