



The Best Whole Body Health Starts in Your Mouth

By Ana Brightleaf, DMD

Good oral health these days means a lot more than just having a sparkling smile. There is growing scientific evidence that poor oral health and periodontal (gum) disease are contributing to a huge range of illnesses that appear, at first glance, to have nothing to do with the mouth or teeth.

Take this example of a case study cited by Dr. Thomandram S. Sekar, an MD, and Dr. David P. Reichwage, a Dentist. They report of a 68-year-old woman who suffered from a range of illnesses from lung abscess and enlarged lymph nodes to chronic diarrhea and elevated white blood cell count. She also had 14 broken or decayed teeth and chronic periodontal infection. There was no correlation between her food intake and her symptoms, and she was often so ill that getting out of bed was a challenge.

Her various ailments and conditions caused her considerable distress and required many hospital visits and stays, including in the Intensive Care Unit. You can imagine the frustration, not to mention the immense cost of tests and treatments for conditions that refused to go away.

Ultimately removing her teeth and dealing with the periodontal disease was recommended. *Within two days of removing her teeth and surgically preparing her mouth for dentures, she experienced reversal of her chronic symptoms* including the return to normal of her white blood cell count, and resolution of her lung abscess.

While this is admittedly a dramatic example, it illustrates how profoundly what's going on in your mouth can affect not only how you look, but how you feel.

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Over the last decade there has been a great deal of research proving periodontal disease is a far greater threat to the overall health of Americans than was previously recognized. In fact, it has been found that periodontal disease contributes to the development of heart disease, the nation's #1 cause of death. Periodontal disease has been classified by our government as a greater risk of stroke and heart disease than high cholesterol. It has also been linked to premature or underweight births and has been shown to increase the risk of pulmonary diseases, like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

If that sounds strange, consider that bacteria in the mouth can be breathed into the lungs, which can aggravate problems or weaknesses already present in the lungs. These bacteria can also travel into the bloodstream or pass into the gastrointestinal tract. In this way, infection or bacteria in the oral cavity can reach virtually any part of the body, taking hold anywhere weakness exists and promoting any number of diseases.

So, what's the solution? Certainly good home oral hygiene is vitally important. However, regular oral exams are also crucial. Why? Because a dentist trained in taking a holistic view of your body and health can find potential problems before they become an issue. This is guaranteed to save you money and, maybe more important, spare you the discomfort of the illness and its treatment.

Among the things such a dentist will monitor is the health of your gums, including checking for bone loss or bleeding points. She or he will perform an oral cancer screening and temporomandibular exam to ascertain joint health.

The bottom line is that maintaining good oral health is easier & far less costly than having to cure an illness or treat a preventable condition. Consider your dentist as a key partner with your other health professionals in assuring that you feel, as well as look, your best. In light of all the new scientific evidence, that's one of the smartest moves you can make.

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