

## DID YOU KNOW...?

Your oral health directly affects your total health? Over 80% of the U.S. population has periodontal (gum) disease and about 80% of them do not know it? Gum disease can cause premature births and low birth weight babies? Gum disease organisms get into your blood and can affect your heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and many other organs? *C-reactive protein*, found in your blood, is a marker for chronic inflammation and is much higher in people that have gum disease? Gum disease increases the risk of death in people with diabetes? If you exercise, diet, take statin drugs to reduce your cholesterol, vitamins, etc., and do not take the time for good oral health, you are reducing their benefits?

Adult-onset, Type 2, diabetes is increasing and it is a known fact that gum disease makes it worse. About 70% of diabetics die prematurely due to cardiovascular or kidney disease. Not long ago physicians felt heart attacks were mainly due to fat deposits in the arteries caused by cholesterol. The assumption was, and is still, that everyone with high cholesterol is at greater risk of heart disease. However, it was discovered that more than half of all heart attacks occurred in people with normal or low cholesterol. New research shows a strong correlation with chronic inflammation and heart disease, cancer, diabetes, asthma, kidney disease, and Alzheimer's. Keeping the mouth clean by flossing and brushing thoroughly each day, and being seen regularly for professional cleanings, can reduce the risk of gum disease which is a major source of chronic inflammation and contributes to the severity of many diseases..

We have over 400 types of bacteria, fungus, and virus that live happily in our mouths. Many are necessary but there are some specific types that are bad. We know that if populations of people get too large problems often occur. Gangs fight other gangs, wars occur, people die, infrastructures collapse, lemmings jump into the ocean. The over-population of organisms in the mouth creates problems, also. Organisms attack the gums and teeth, kill off good colonies, cause the body to fight back with its defenses, and some of them jump off into the bloodstream. Periodontal disease is an indication the bad element is winning. We need to reduce the populations of bad organisms or our oral and general health can deteriorate.

Most people do not know they have periodontal disease because it is usually painless. Similarly, most people do not know they have high blood pressure, cancer, AIDS, diabetes, and many other ailments because there are typically no symptoms in the early stages of disease. When symptoms occur the problems are often in the advanced stages. There are some simple things you can do for your oral health that do not require pills, a major change in lifestyle, diet, or exercise.

What are signs of gum disease? BLEEDING GUMS when you brush or floss. RED or SWOLLEN GUMS are from the extra blood vessels needed to fight the disease. SORENESS when you brush or floss is caused by the swollen nerves in the infected areas. LOOSE or SENSITIVE TEETH are caused by inflammation or destruction of bone and gums. RECEDING GUMLINES from bone infection make your teeth look longer. BAD BREATH can come from the accumulation of bad, smelly bacteria, pus, and dying gum tissue. Sorry for the gross descriptions but what you don't know, and can't feel, can hurt you.

What can you do? First of all see your dentist to find out if you have gum disease, what stage it is in, learn about the disease, and what you can do about it. Your dental team can only help you if you help yourself so you will have some homework to do. Perhaps as much as six minutes a day, two of which you can do while watching TV. Better oral health may require that you do things a little differently, with a little more thought, but it doesn't take much time.

When you see your hygienist for a cleaning, realize that it is not done solely to make your teeth look cleaner. It is for control of disease and to help you maintain good oral health. Your teeth are polished with a fine pumice to help remove stain, but stain does not cause disease. Your hygienist is improving the health of your whole body by removing organisms that live under the gums and between teeth, getting into places you may be missing that harbor mass quantities of bacteria, and tarter. If it makes your gums sore don't blame the hygienist. Soreness is usually due to your bacteria causing inflammation, from

improper brushing, lack of regular flossing, and too much time between professional cleanings. People that do their homework each day, and are seen regularly for cleanings, often say that cleanings feel good.

Treat yourself to good oral health. When you think about what your hygienist is doing for you and your health they really deserve some thanks.