



ORAL HEALTH

Don't Let a Dirty Mouth Pollute Your Clean Heart

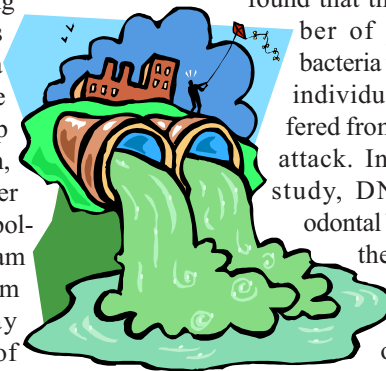
Taking care of your oral health will give you a winning smile and may also be heart healthy. Do you find this far-fetched to believe? It's true...A dirty mouth is like a factory dumping into a river. Using this analogy, the bacteria from your mouth is the sewage that can seep into your bloodstream, or in this case the river causing it to become polluted. Your bloodstream carries bacteria from the mouth and may cause the arteries of the heart to become polluted with periodontal bacteria. This can bring about inflammation of the arteries and possibly increase your risk of having a heart attack.

Periodontal researchers are racing to find out more about exactly how periodontal disease may affect heart disease. Recent issues of the *Journal of Periodontology* published findings about this topic. Following is a brief overview of these studies providing a pulse on the connection:

Levels of Oral Bacteria May Increase Risk for Heart Attacks

Two studies in the May 2005 is-

sue furthered researchers' understanding about the potential link between the periodontal bacteria found in the mouth and heart disease. In one study, researchers found that the total number of periodontal bacteria was higher in individuals that suffered from a heart attack. In the second study, DNA of periodontal bacteria from the mouth was found in the plaque of the heart's arteries.



Researchers believe these findings may help confirm what they have long known - if there is a sterile pathway, such as a bloodstream near an infected area, the bacteria can travel to other parts of the body and cause harm.

Although more research needs to be done, periodontists are advising people to maintain good oral health.

Deep Periodontal Pockets Increase Risk for Electrocardiographic Abnormalities

In another study suggesting a relationship between periodontitis

and cardiovascular disease, researchers found that people with deep periodontal pockets had an increased risk for Electrocardiographic (ECG) abnormalities. People with severe attachment loss also had a significant risk for ECG abnormalities.

Periodontitis is a chronic inflammatory bacterial infection. Past studies reported that when periodontitis is present, it elevates levels of other inflammatory substances such as C-reactive protein (CRP), interleukin-6 and neutrophils. This suggests that when these inflammatory substances are elevated, the risk of a cardiac event is also elevated.

Additional studies are required in order to examine the degree of cardiovascular risk from periodontitis compared with other risk factors. Because problematic ECG results are a widely appreciated risk factor for cardiovascular disease, it could be valuable to know if periodontal treatment could improve ECG exams. ECG exams cause no discomfort and take only a few minutes, so it's a common screening for heart disease. ECG abnormalities are a sensitive predictors of fatal coronary heart disease.

Your Routine Blood Test May One Day Send You to a Periodontist

In a recent study reported in the *Journal of Periodontology (JOP)*, researchers found that a routine medical blood test may also reveal indicators of periodontal diseases.

Researchers examined and measured the oral health of 7,452 men and women, and tested their blood for 37 items used in general blood tests. Some of the items tested for in the blood include cholesterol and C-reactive protein, commonly linked to heart disease; and diabetes. The results of the blood tests were compared against the oral health

scores of participants.

The study found that generally if the blood was "healthy," the oral health was also healthy, and if the blood test detected certain "red flags," serious symptoms of periodontal disease were present. Men were reported to have more serious symptoms of periodontal diseases than females. The only item from the blood test that showed a significant relationship with periodontal disease in women was CRP.

Although a specific reason could not be pinpointed, one reason could be that men and women have different endocrine situations, and periodontal diseases are influenced by endocrine conditions.

In the future when patients visit their medical doctors for routine exams and annual blood work is drawn, they may also be referred to a periodontist for a periodontal screening if the blood indicates systemic abnormalities.

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM for a free brochure on periodontal disease.

For more information visit www.perio.org