

Oral and overall health link



Keeping your teeth and gums healthy makes your RealAge 6.4 years younger.”

~Michael F. Roizen, M.D.



Situation

Oral infections can cause or aggravate overall health problems and ultimately lead to higher healthcare costs.

In a recent study, participants who had heart disease and periodontal disease had 16 percent higher medical claims than those with just heart disease.¹ The same was true for diabetes and claims related to preterm, low-birth weight babies: Each had a 9 percent increase in medical claims when the person had periodontal disease. Most adults over age 25 have some form of periodontal disease, with the severity increasing with age.²

Exacerbating the problem, many people who have diabetes, heart disease or are pregnant do not see their dentist for routine cleanings. In fact, in an internal claims study, 51 percent of diabetics, 44 percent of members with heart disease, and 52 percent of expectant mothers did not use their dental benefits, not even for routine cleanings.³

Evidence

Periodontal disease has a negative effect on people with other diseases or are pregnant, according to MayoClinic.com: “Oral health and overall health: Why a healthy mouth is good for your body” (Feb 18, 2005):

- › Chronic gum disease may make diabetes more difficult to control (insulin resistance).
- › Diabetics are more likely to develop oral infections and periodontal disease. The reverse also seems to be true.¹
- › Bacteria in the mouth may cause inflammation throughout the body, including the arteries.
- › The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research estimates that as many as 18 percent of preterm, low-birth weight babies born in the United States each year may be attributed to oral infections.

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¹ *An examination of periodontal treatment and per member per month (PMPM) medical costs in an insured population.* BMC Health Services Research. August 2006

² *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000*

³ Internal review of medical and dental claims costs, April 2007

Periodontal disease and prevention

Periodontal disease occurs when the tissue around your teeth becomes infected. If left untreated, the gums and bones around your teeth can become damaged and cause tooth loss.

The early stage of periodontitis is called gingivitis. Gingivitis occurs when plaque accumulates around your teeth and gums. Signs of periodontal (gum) disease include: bleeding gums, sore or swollen gums, gums that have pulled away from teeth, and loose teeth.

To prevent periodontal disease, brush and floss regularly and visit your dentist for regular cleanings and checkups. Your dentist can identify early signs of periodontal disease and address it before it becomes a problem.

Other References

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- › *American Academy of Periodontology Statement Regarding Periodontal Management of the Pregnant Patient*. Journal of Periodontology, March 2004