



NUTRITION AND ORAL HEALTH

Milk does a mouth good

Adults who consume at least three servings of calcium each day have another reason to smile. A new study published in the July, 2000 issue of the *Journal of Periodontology* found that people who get enough calcium have significantly lower rates of periodontal disease, a leading cause of tooth loss.

Researchers found that men and women who had calcium intakes of fewer than 500 milligrams, or about half the recommended dietary allowance, were almost twice as likely to have periodontal disease, as measured by the loss of attachment of the gums from the teeth. The association was particularly evident for young adults in their 20s and 30s.

The relationship between calcium intake and periodontal disease is likely due to calcium's role in building density in the alveolar bone that supports the teeth. Pe-

riodontal disease is an infection caused by bacteria that accumulate in pockets between the teeth and gums. Eventually, the infection can break down and destroy the tissues and bone that support the teeth. But, if the jaw bone is kept strong with enough calcium, it may be better able to withstand the bacterial onslaught.

Calcium is necessary for healthy bones, teeth, muscle contractions and other body functions. However, according to the American Dietetic Association, about three out of four people do not meet their daily need. Good sources of calcium include dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese, dark green veggies, fortified orange juice, as well as rice and beans.

A relationship between calcium intake and periodontal disease makes sense in light of other new research linking osteoporosis with



tooth loss. However, people need to keep in mind that several other important risk factors exist for periodontal disease, including tobacco use, oral hygiene habits, genetics, diabetes, certain medications and stress. In addition to drinking milk, ask your dentist or periodontist about the state of your periodontal health to help prevent tooth loss. He or she can help you identify and control the risk factors for periodontal disease. 🐄

shows increased serum triglyceride levels in uncontrolled diabetics seems to be related to greater attachment loss and probing depths, measures of periodontal disease. Reducing cholesterol and serum triglyceride levels, preferably through diet and exercise, may be the most important change that diabetics can make to improve their quality of life, as well as their oral health. 🐄

Nourish your smile

A diet low in important nutrients can make it harder for the body's immune system to fight off infection. Because periodontal disease is an infection, a well-balanced diet benefits your oral health.

In addition to calcium, research has shown that not getting enough vitamin C may put you at increased risk for periodontal disease, especially if you smoke. Good sources of vitamin C include dark colored fruits and vegetables, such as oranges, green and red peppers, broccoli and strawberries.

Here's some other nutritional recommendations to help keep you smiling:

- Keep your mouth moist by drinking lots of water. Saliva is

important in warding off tooth decay and periodontal disease because it washes away food and neutralizes plaque. If you have dry mouth, your dentist or periodontist can recommend various methods to restore moisture, including sugarless gum, oral rinses or artificial saliva products.

- Foods that are sticky, such as raisins, fruit rolls and candy, can cling to the teeth and promote tooth decay. Brush and floss after eating sticky foods.

- Good nutrition plays an important role in protecting the oral health of diabetics. Research

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