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The Mouth and Heart Connection

Cardiovascular disease is a class of disease that affects the heart and/or blood vessels. It is estimated that more than 80 million people in the United States have one or more forms of cardiovascular disease; these forms include high blood pressure, coronary heart disease (acute heart attack and angina pectoris), stroke, and heart failure. Studies have shown that there is a link between cardiovascular disease and periodontal (gum) disease, the chronic inflammation and infection of the gums and surrounding tissue. Forms of gum disease, such as gingivitis (gum inflammation) and periodontitis (bone loss), can be indicators for cardiovascular problems, which is why it is important for individuals at risk for cardiovascular disease to visit a dentist on a regular basis, practice good oral hygiene, and keep their dentist informed of any oral and overall health issues.

How are periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease connected?

It has been suggested that the inflammatory proteins and bacteria associated with gum disease enter a person's bloodstream and can cause various effects on the cardiovascular system. A study published in the February 2005 issue of *Circulation* examined the presence of the bacteria known to cause periodontitis and the thickening of the blood vessel wall typically seen in heart disease. After examining samples from more than 650 participants, the investigators concluded that the presence of the same bacteria known to cause periodontitis was associated with an increased level of blood vessel thickening.

What can I do to keep my gums and heart healthy?

Practicing proper oral hygiene is essential to maintaining healthy gums. This includes flossing regularly, brushing twice a day with antibacterial toothpaste, and visiting a dentist at least every six months. A healthy diet and regular exercise can help improve both your cardiovascular health and your overall health.

What do my physician and dentist need to know?

It is important to keep all medical professionals up-to-date on your oral and overall health issues. Inform your physician if you have been diagnosed with a form of periodontal disease or are experiencing any issues with gum inflammation. Likewise, inform your dentist if you have been diagnosed with any form of cardiovascular disease, have experienced any cardiovascular problems, or have a family history of cardiovascular disease.

What other risk factors are associated with cardiovascular disease?

Individuals who are most at risk for cardiovascular disease include those over age 65, African-Americans, Hispanics, and males. While these particular factors cannot be changed, there are some risk factors that you can change through lifestyle management and/or medical treatment to reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease. These risk factors include smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption, and stress. Questions? Be sure to ask your physician and dentist.

Academy of General Dentistry™

Resources

www.knowyourteeth.com
Brought to you by the AGD, this Web site answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and it can help visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

1.877.2X.A.YEAR
AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.

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