

## **Periodontal disease and cardio link**

Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter, explains: "The link between oral health and overall body health is well documented and backed by robust scientific evidence. Despite this, only one in six people realises that people with gum disease may have an increased risk of stroke or diabetes. And only one in three is aware of the heart disease link."

### **Gum disease dangers**

Gum disease is an infection of the tissues that support the teeth. It's mainly caused by bacteria from plaque build-up. In some patients who are susceptible to gum disease, the body over-reacts to the bacteria around the gums and causes too much inflammation. In others, the inflammation doesn't clear up properly. The result of the intense gum inflammation is that it also affects the bloodstream, and is believed to slowly damage blood vessels in the heart and brain over a long period of time.

### **What's the damage?**

Gum disease has been linked to a variety of other health problems, including:

- heart disease and heart attacks
- diabetes and its control
- stroke
- rheumatoid arthritis

### **Preventing problems**

The good news is that brushing your teeth properly and looking after your gums can prevent and treat gum disease, improve your overall health and help to reduce your risk of health problems, such as heart disease.

Follow a routine of brushing your teeth for a full two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, plus cleaning between your teeth with floss or interdental brushes.

Visit your dentist and dental hygienist regularly for cleaning and check-ups.

## The heart and mouth connection: How heart disease and oral health link

Did you know that heart disease and oral health are linked? There are two different connections between heart disease and your oral health:

1. Studies have shown that people with moderate or advanced gum (periodontal) disease are more likely to have heart disease than those with healthy gums.
2. Oral health holds clues to overall health. Studies have shown that oral health can provide warning signs for other diseases or conditions, including heart disease.

### **Are you at risk?**

Many of the risk factors for gum disease are the same as those for heart disease, such as tobacco use, poor nutrition and diabetes. Overall, people who have chronic gum disease are at higher risk for a heart attack, according to the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD). Gum disease (called gingivitis in its early stages and periodontal disease in the late stages) is caused by plaque buildup along and below the gum line. Research has suggested that gum disease may contribute to heart disease because bacteria from infected gums can dislodge, enter the bloodstream, attach to blood vessels and increase clot formation. It has also been suggested that inflammation caused by gum disease may also trigger clot formation. Clots decrease blood flow to the heart, thereby causing an elevation in blood pressure and increasing the risk of a heart attack.

Research shows that many systemic diseases – including heart disease – have oral symptoms. Dentists can help patients who have a history of heart disease by examining them for any signs of oral pain, infection or inflammation. According to the AGD, proper diagnosis and treatment of tooth and gum infections in some of these patients have led to a decrease in blood pressure medications and improved overall health. If you currently have heart disease, make sure to tell your dentist about your condition as well as any medications you are currently taking. Remember to carefully follow your physician's and dentist's instructions about health care.

### **Warning signs**

Gum disease affects 90% of adults in the UK and often the condition goes undiagnosed. Warning signs that you may have gum disease include:

- Red, tender or swollen gums
- Bleeding gums while brushing or flossing
- Gums that seem to be pulling away from your teeth
- Chronic bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth

- Teeth that are loose or separating from each other

#### Proactive prevention

While regular dental exams and cleanings are necessary to remove bacteria, plaque and tartar and detect early signs of gum disease, you can play a major role in preventing gum disease every day. The best way to be proactive in maintaining your oral and overall health is scheduling regular dental checkups, getting professional cleanings and regular brushing and flossing. Taking steps to stop gum disease at the source is the best way to keep your smile beautiful at any age.