

Dental Health and Your Heart...It really matters

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The connection of gum disease and cardiovascular disease is not a connection people naturally put together. All research indicates we should take these two health concerns and make a connection that could save lives.

A recent study published in the Journal of American Heart Association stated that 657 people without known heart disease had higher blood levels of certain disease-causing bacteria in the mouth were more likely to have atherosclerosis in the carotid artery in the neck. Clogged carotid arteries can lead to stroke.

The plaque on the teeth does contribute to gum disease but it is not the same kind of plaque in our arteries. Experts believe it is the bacteria from the mouth entering the bloodstream through the gums that is the culprit. Research has found the same bacteria found in the gums have been found clumped in artery plaques. One theory is these bacteria stick to the fatty plaques in the bloodstream and directly contribute to blockages.

Another thing that is believed to happen when this bacteria enters the blood stream is the reaction of the body's defense mechanisms against bacteria, this reaction is inflammation. Inflammation as we all know by now is at the root of all disease. The inflammation caused by oral bacteria entering in the bloodstream is believed to cause the blood cells to swell. This swelling could narrow the arteries and increase the risk of clots.

A survey taken by the American Academy of Periodontology showed most dentists who treat gum disease believe that a well-balanced diet, including supplements, improves the health of the teeth and gums. 75% of the periodontists polled recommended vitamin C to their patients to strengthen connective tissue in the gums.

Another study concluded, bleeding due to periodontitis was reduced by an average of 85% using vitamin, mineral and amino acid supplement. As far back as the 1930's Dr. Weston Price, DDS, conducted extensive research that suggests mineral deficiencies are the real cause of tooth decay. These studies seem to fall right in line with the thinking that, "you are what you eat." Poor diet shows up in all areas of our health and gum disease is no exception.

Dr. Joel Knapp, DDS states there are a lot of cases of gum disease that had no plaque at all. He also mentions that the study found people who did not eat healthy, get enough sleep and were under a lot of stress had considerable higher cases of gingivitis. So again our life styles seem to be contributing to gum disease and now there are studies that do show the connection to heart disease.

It would make sense if we can reduce the amount of bacteria in the mouth we can possibly improve our cardiovascular health too. The bacteria that causes most tooth decay are *Streptococcus mutans*. *Streptococcus mutans* thrives on sugar and starches. Since the average person consumes 115 pounds of sugar a year it is no wonder tooth decay has been on the rise. Almost every meal today includes starch too. Starch quickly converts to sugar and starchy things quickly stick to the spaces between the teeth.

I must mention that soda pop is one of the worst things you can consume that contributes to poor teeth. It literally eats away at the enamel on the teeth. It also depletes the body of so many good nutrients and makes the bones soft and weak. I do like soda pop but I love my teeth and bones more!!

For those of you who just can't give up the ultra sweet taste of things there are two great natural sweeteners on the market. I am not referring to chemical sweeteners like Aspartame and Splenda™. Yes they are chemicals!! For instance, Splenda does come from sugar but by the time they chemically change it you are now ingesting chlorine when you use it. Stevia™ and Xylito™ are excellent natural sugars from plant life. Actually Xylito can be used in mouth wash, gum and mints to help prevent bacteria growth in the mouth. It is a very effective bacteria and yeast killer. So for better oral health think natural sweeteners.

A healthy immune system will help in the battle against bacteria. Our immune system is working 24/7 fighting off all kinds of invaders to our body and the bacteria from mouth is just another challenge for our immune system. So supporting the immune system would be a great first step towards battling Streptococcus mutans. Echinacea provides a 1-2-3- punch for gum problems. Echinacea that is prepared from the roots of three species gives the best results. It not only boosts the immune system but it promotes wound healing, hence bleeding gums.

CoQ10 is a vitamin-like substance that occurs in every cell. It is an important part of cellular energy production. It is well known that coQ10 supplementation increases the vitality of the heart muscle tissue, the gums (which are made of the very similar tissue) benefit from CoQ10. Note: If you take a statin drug like Lipitor, Crestor, etc. these drugs have a tendency to deplete CoQ10 from the body so supplementing with CoQ10 is always a consideration for heart and gum health.

Vitamin C, Bilberry fruit and Hawthorn fruit are all available in supplements. They all support connective tissue and cells in the gums.

Sometimes a mineral may be important for the body to make enzymes. Enzymes are important for the body to be able to break down proteins. Anytime the body can do a better job of putting proteins together and take them apart, it can do a better job of healing. Two important minerals for this process would be zinc and magnesium.

As mentioned earlier a good amino acid formula could benefit the heart and the gums. Some of the key amino acids in a formula should be L-Argine, Taurine, L-Glutamine, N-Acetyl-L-Cysteine, and Acetyl-L-Carnitine. If a formula is combined with high powered antioxidants you then have one of the best circulatory supportive products you could take for your heart and gums.

Sometimes it is frustrating when we learn about all the changes we need to make to make our bodies healthier including oral health. The only clear choice we have is to make changes because our health really does depend on this. One profound statement that holds true for a lot of life's challenges is this, "If you keep doing what you have always done you will get what you always got." So if we want our gums and heart to be healthier we need to listen to our dentist and make those changes.

A beautiful healthy looking smile reflects more about our health than we even know.