



Good Oral Health is Essential to Overall Health

We all need to take our oral health a lot more seriously. Poor oral health increases our risk of stroke, heart disease—including fatal heart attacks—and diabetes. It can lead to respiratory infections like pneumonia, bone mass loss in older women and premature births. Good oral health is essential to overall health.

Your Mouth is the Gateway to Your Body

According to the American Academy of Periodontology, infections in the mouth can cause harm to other parts of the body. Bacteria that builds up on teeth makes gums prone to infection. The immune system moves in to attack the infection and the gums become inflamed. Over time the inflammation and the chemicals it releases eat away at the gums and bone structure resulting in severe gum disease known as periodontitis.

Inflammation causes problems for the other parts of the body too. Research shows that inflammation may link periodontal disease to other chronic inflammatory conditions like diabetes and heart disease.



Oral Health and Diabetes

Inflammation that starts in the mouth weakens the body's ability to control blood sugar. It impairs the body's ability to utilize insulin. Diabetes and periodontal disease goes both ways. High blood sugar provides ideal conditions for infections, including gum infections, to grow and periodontal disease may make it more difficult for diabetics to control their blood sugar levels.

Oral Health and Heart Disease

Gum disease and heart disease often go hand in hand. According to the American Academy of Periodontology, people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to have heart disease. Inflammation is a major risk factor for heart disease, and periodontal disease may increase inflammation in the blood vessels and throughout the body. Inflamed blood vessels constrict blood flow and raise blood pressure.

Oral Health and Pregnancy

Pregnant women are at risk of developing pregnancy gingivitis. Worsened by both poor oral hygiene and increased hormone levels, pregnancy gingivitis can cause changes in taste and red, swollen gums that bleed easily. Pregnancy gingivitis develops in almost half of all pregnant women and generally ends shortly after the child is born. Periodontal disease can develop from the result of untreated gingivitis and can lead to deterioration of bone and surrounding gum tissue.

And, periodontal disease can have an impact on the health of the baby. Women with periodontal disease who become pregnant should seek early prenatal care because they have increased risk for premature birth, and that there is now a treatment (progesterone) that can reduce that risk by 30-35% (demonstrated in randomized trials).



More research is being done to study the link between gum disease and health conditions such as osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease, and lung disease.

We all need to pay better attention to the interdependence of oral health and general health and well being. Oral health is far more than having healthy teeth. We must adopt practices and policies that improve oral health, prevent disease, and make Ohio healthier.



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UHCAN Ohio is a statewide nonprofit organization working to inform and unite consumers and their allies to influence decision makers so that all Ohioans can get the care they need to lead healthier lives.

Dental Access Now! is a statewide coalition working to bring quality dental care to every community. Led by UHCAN Ohio, Dental Access Now! is educating the public about the lack of access to dental care and pursuing solutions that include alternative providers to reach underserved communities. We will work to support any organization which seeks to increase access to dental care for underserved Ohioans.