



Tooth Talk

Do your gums bleed when you bite down on a crispy apple or a crusty piece of bread? Do they bleed when you brush your teeth? If they do, you should immediately make an appointment to see your dentist. The most common cause of bleeding gums is a bacterial infection of the gums. Dentists call it **periodontal disease** or **gum disease**.

75 percent of the population suffer from gum disease in various degrees of severity. Mild gum disease is called **gingivitis**, severe gum disease is called **periodontitis**. Although gum disease can cause major problems and pain and expense, its symptoms are often mild, except in the most severe cases when your teeth start falling out. Many people who have mild to moderate gum disease don't even know they have it.

The consequences of untreated gum disease can be quite serious. It is the major cause of tooth loss in adults. And it can significantly increase your risk for heart disease, stroke, and osteoporosis. Pregnant women with gum disease have a significantly higher risk of miscarriage and premature birth.

Fortunately, gum disease can easily be prevented by following a few simple oral hygiene rules. And if you have gum disease, you can improve your situation by improving your oral hygiene.

We'll show you how.

What Happens When You Get Gum Disease?

Whether or not you have gum disease (periodontal disease), everybody has bacteria in their mouths. Some bacteria are harmless, and some can infect you and cause disease. You should not try to kill all the bacteria in your mouth - you will only end up hurting delicate oral tissues. It is enough to keep the harmful bacteria in check. We live in a world of microbes, and we must learn to live in harmony with them.

Bacteria in your mouth form plaque - a soft, white substance which adheres to teeth, tongue, and gums. Harmful bacteria can live beneath this soft blanket. Inadequate oral care will fail to remove all the plaque from your mouth, especially from between your teeth. When plaque is not removed, it calcifies (hardens). Calcified plaque, known as tartar, cannot be removed by simply brushing and flossing - your dental hygienist must do it.

The longer tartar is left on teeth and gums, the more harmful bacteria can grow beneath it. The bacteria beneath tartar release toxins which damage your gums and cause inflammation. These bacteria also invade gum tissue, leading to even more inflamma-

tion. Early inflammation of the gums is called **gingivitis**, and is the first stage of gum disease.

Fortunately, gingivitis is easily prevented by proper flossing and brushing. Ask your dentist to review your flossing and brushing techniques. Many dentists recommend advanced electrical toothbrushes such as Rotadent. These devices can remove plaque and bacteria that

hide just below the gumline, where manual toothbrushes cannot reach.

If left unchecked, gingivitis may progress to **periodontitis**. Often painless, periodontitis occurs when bacterial infection of the gums spreads down along the tooth to its root. When this happens, your

gums will pull away from the affected tooth, causing a deep pocket to form. Your dentist can check your pocket depth with a probe to see if you have or have had gum disease. If periodontitis is left unchecked, your jaw bone will dissolve and your teeth will progressively loosen till they fall out.

Other signs of gum disease include halitosis (bad breath), red or swollen gums, loose teeth, pus issuing from the gums, tender gums or pain on chewing, gums which bleed spontaneously, or bleeding when eating or brushing your teeth.

Stop periodontal disease early to spare yourself major pain, expense, and serious health problems.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GINGIVITIS AND PERIODONTITIS

FROM THE DENTIST . . .

As April is dental health month, we in the dental profession attempt to further focus public awareness on dental health and related concerns. It is my hope that these newsletters help to do this throughout the year, but this is especially true for the month of April when I hope the information contained here will enhance what you already know and what you may hear or read. In the news of late, you may have encountered reports of a relationship between gum disease and cardiovascular and other health concerns. I thought I would take this opportunity to inform you of the thinking on this matter.

The first article I have included is indicative of several of the recent pieces I have encountered, proposing the existence of a correlation. The overexposure of this topic prompted me to do some independent review of the scientific literature. As a result, I have included a summary of the findings following the first article.

It is important not to discount the possibility of a relationship, but it must be remembered it is the media's job to tell a sensational story. As you will read, there is **no conclusive evidence**. Nonetheless, until conclusive studies can be done, why not err on the side of caution and take care of your teeth and gums. Dentists have always maintained that the mouth is a window to the body, and a healthy mouth is a sign of a healthy body. Take care of your periodontal health, regardless. You'll feel better for it.

In other news, a study done in Sao Paulo, Brazil, analyzed the pH (acidity) and other factors (the amount of calcium) of several beers to determine if a prediction could be made as to which beer would be most detrimental to teeth. The results found that Heineken had the highest pH, therefore the lowest erosive capability. So, not only should you watch what you eat, but now there is additional evidence that you should watch what you drink!

In patient news, we would like to congratulate a few of our patients on some of the significant events that have taken place in their lives, over the last few months. Congratulations to Ken Carmichael and Delta Hamblin on their engagement, and to Ken for receiving his Chartered Account designation. Congrats also to Chris Limberger for achieving his CA designation. Happy 35th anniversary to Pat & Gord Osbourne. More wedding bell congratulations to Tara McKay and her fiancé, who are being married over the Easter weekend.

Here's something to keep in mind if the Easter bunny finds your household with his delicious chocolates. As candies go, chocolate is better for your teeth. While hard candies can break teeth and sticky candies stick to dental work and the dark crevices of your teeth, chocolate contains tannins which help prevent the bacteria causing cavities from sticking to your teeth.

Finally, check out the working model of our office website (<http://members.home.net/drbuschel/SDCOnline/home.htm>). It is still under construction, but it does function. If you have any comments/suggestions on the site or anything else, drop us a line. Send us your email address and we'll mail you the next newsletter electronically.

Have a great Easter holiday!

Dr. Darren Buschel

YOUR GUMS OR YOUR LIFE

By Richard Stinson from Modern Maturity magazine July-August 2000

I admit it. As my periodontist prepared to probe my gums with a shiny Orwellian torture device, I was scared. Lurking behind an old filling, a rapacious cavity had sullied my back molar. The tooth could be saved with a crown, but to do so, my periodontist had to abrade a tiny area on the jawbone so the surrounding gum could properly adhere to it – a bit like roughing up a surface with sandpaper before a paint job. Oh yes: He'd also make a few small incisions to "access" the area. Hence the torture device.

But, as my periodontist worked on my, tooth, he began talking about gum disease – and I realized things could be worse. Studies increasingly show a connection between good gums and good overall health, linking gum disease – otherwise known as periodontal disease – to a variety of systemic problems, including heart disease and stroke.

"An accumulating body of evidence suggests that periodontal infection may contribute to arteriosclerotic heart diseases," says oral bacteria researcher Robert J. Genco, D.D.S., Ph.D., of the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Medicine. In a recent University of Michigan study involving 400 men 60 and older, researchers found that those suffering from advanced periodontal disease were four and a half times more likely to have coronary heart disease than those without gum disease. Why is periodontal disease so hard on your heart? Researchers have found that people with gum disease tend to have high blood levels of fibrinogen, a molecule that can cause clotting, and C-reactive protein, an inflammatory molecule. The study, reported in the February American Journal of Epidemiology, also found that people with periodontal disease may have higher levels of cholesterol.

The same molecules that affect your heart can also block the blood flow to your brain, which can increase your risk of stroke. A 1999 preliminary study at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons found that people with diseased gums tended to have more

plaque in their carotid (neck) arteries. Those with the most diseased gums had 1.12 millimeters of buildup in their artery lining, compared with 0.74 millimeters for those with the healthiest gums. That's not good, since the National Stroke Association estimates that clots or blockages in arteries account for 80% of all strokes – one reason why neurologists should keep an eye on their patients' teeth. "Doctors caring for stroke patients need to take into account their patients' periodontal status, and if necessary refer them to dentists," suggests Columbia University study author and neurologist Mitchell Elkind, M.D.

Diabetics should also schedule regular dental visits. Researchers at the Texas A&M University Health Science Centre have found that uncontrolled diabetes can lead to a higher risk of gum disease – which, in turn, can make diabetes more problematic, since severe periodontal disease can increase blood sugar. Periodontal disease has also been linked to osteoporosis and respiratory problems.

Fortunately, there's an upside to all this. (As a new patient to a dental office, or as a patient undergoing recare.) Dentists check their patients' mouths for early signs of hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes. At the University of Alabama at Birmingham, researchers are studying whether dental x-rays of bones around the jaw can help predict the onset of osteoporosis elsewhere in the body, (thus the need for x-rays at your yearly visits, and a full mouth picture every five years). In early 2001, dental organizations, physicians, and biologists plan to convene at the national Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, to review the latest research linking gum infection and chronic diseases of the body.

For now, however, there's little mystery about how to care for your gums. With conscientious brushing, consistent flossing, and semi-annual dental visits, gum disease can usually be prevented or controlled. If you need to visit a periodontist, don't be afraid: Today's gum treatments are more pain-free than you think – and a far better alternative to heart disease and stroke.

NOW, THE REST OF THE STORY . . .

The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) is concerned about accumulating research that links periodontal disease to patients' overall health.

Among other evidence, one study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (September 13, 2000) suggests that "gum disease" may be linked to other health concerns. On the other hand, an article appearing one week later in the JAMA showed only a very weak link between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease.

Contradictory studies are common in medical research until intervention studies are conducted to prove or disprove working hypotheses. Until the research on the link between periodontal disease and general health conditions is conclusive, the best advice for patients continues to be that people should take care of their periodontal health. In addition to helping people keep their teeth, it may help protect overall health. –from the AAP (19/09/00)

For the Office of Dr. Darren Buschel

Office Hours

Tuesday 8:30am – 5:30pm
Wednesday 10:00am– 7:00pm
Thursday 8:30am – 5:30pm
Friday 8:30am – 5:30pm

(weekends and evening appts available)

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