

Smilematters

PATIENT FACT SHEET

Oral Health and Your Heart

Did you know that 85 percent of people who have had a heart attack also have had some form of periodontal disease? It's also been found that the connection between heart disease and heart attacks is higher than the connection between high cholesterol and heart attacks. You should be aware of these potential complications, and always notify your dentist if you notice any changes in your health.

How is heart disease linked to dental health symptoms?

There are several theories as to how the two are linked. One theory is that bacteria may enter the bloodstream through the mouth and have the potential to attach to fatty deposits in the blood vessels, which may contribute to heart disease. Another theory is that the inflammation associated with periodontitis may play a role. The most common strain of bacteria in dental plaque can cause blood clots that induce heart attacks when they escape into the bloodstream. Research has found that people with gum disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease.

Are you at risk?

Certain conditions can also put you at higher risk for periodontal disease, such as diabetes, arthritis and other conditions that affect your immune system or your ability to heal. Medications can cause a dry mouth, which can reduce the amount of saliva you produce and make you more prone to infection.

Tobacco use is believed to be one of the

most significant risk factors for periodontal disease — this includes cigars, smokeless tobacco and hookah water pipes.

Symptoms of periodontal disease

Watch out for bleeding, swollen, red or irritated gums. A receding gumline, pus on the gums, pain when you bite or chew, loose or shifting teeth, changes in the fit of your dentures, or chronic bad breath can also be signs of trouble.

Prevention: involve your dentist and physician

First and foremost, as with all health issues, it's important to keep your dentist informed of any changes in your health and any risk factors you are aware of. If you are taking medication, your dentist can coordinate treatment with your physician. Gum disease can weaken heart medication that you are currently taking. This is another reason why it is important to always take care of your mouth and visit your dentist and physician regularly. Brush and floss regularly and see your dentist twice a year for cleanings. By simply removing plaque you're reducing your risks.

Keep your mouth and your heart healthy!