

Smilematters

PATIENT FACT SHEET

Protect Your Heart — Prevent Periodontal Disease

Your oral health is an important part of your overall health and your dentist is a key member of your personal health care team. Studies have increasingly shown that the lips, tongue, gums, salivary glands and oral tissue can all warn of trouble in your general health. What your dentist sees in your mouth may reveal the first signs of systemic disease, or a disease that affects the entire body, rather than a single organ or body part.

An estimated 200 million Americans suffer from periodontal disease, an inflammation of the gums. Studies have shown that people with severe periodontal disease are more likely to develop cardiovascular disease than those without gum infection. Approximately 85% of people who have had a heart attack have some form of periodontal disease.

A study released in February 2005 showed that older adults who have higher proportions of four periodontal-disease-causing bacteria in their mouths also tend to have thicker carotid arteries, a strong predictor of stroke and heart attack. The study was published in the journal *Circulation*, and is supported by four agencies of the National Institutes of Health. The report was the first to draw a direct connection between cardiovascular disease and bacteria involved in periodontal disease.

Preventing Problems: Good oral hygiene and regular dental visits are important to preventing problems — especially for patients with heart conditions. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and flossing once a day helps remove decay-causing plaque. Good oral health maintenance and a healthy diet can help boost the body's resistance to infection and gum disease.

Keep Your Dentist Up-to-Date: It is important to keep your dentist informed of any medical complications each time you have a dental visit. In order to make informed decisions about your treatment plan, your dentist needs to know:

- if you have been diagnosed with a heart condition;
- if the condition is under control;
- if there has been any other change in your medical history;
- the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

Common Oral Health Problems

Associated with Heart Disease: Patients with heart disease can have increased risk for a variety of oral health problems. It is important to make sure your dentist is aware of any changes you may notice in your mouth so these problems can be addressed as early as possible.

Good Communication and Monitoring is Key: keeping your dentist informed about changes in your health will help your dentist provide you with the best care. Be sure to contact your dentist right away if you start experiencing problems such as trouble chewing, bleeding or sore gums, red or swollen gums, or sore or loose teeth. By practicing good oral hygiene habits and eating a healthy diet, you can enjoy a healthy body and a healthy mouth.