



## FLOSS OR DIE!

Did I get your attention! There are few things that are more of a pain in the neck (pardon the pun) than flossing your teeth. We've been told since childhood to brush and floss our teeth each night, we've seen our parents or grandparents put their teeth in jars, we've been through the novacaine and drill to remove decay on our teeth, but to put that 18 inch piece of string routinely between our teeth just escapes most people. But there is a lot more at stake than just saving your teeth, gums and jawbone. Recent findings indicate that gum and bone disease may precipitate or aggravate health problems elsewhere in the body.

### INFECTIONS GO BODYWIDE

More than 400 species of bacteria live in the human mouth, where some can infect the mouth and then spread. "People think of gum disease in terms of their teeth, but they don't think about the fact that gum disease is a serious infection that can release bacteria into the blood stream," said Dr. Robert Genco, editor of the Journal of Periodontology and professor of oral biology at State University of New York at Buffalo. "The end result could mean additional health risks for people whose health is already affected by other diseases-or lead to serious complications like heart disease."

### SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

A century ago, a spurious link between periodontal disease and rheumatoid arthritis prompted dentists to extract all of a person's teeth in the hopes of curing the arthritis. This mistaken belief virtually halted for many decades any serious research into the relationship between periodontitis and other diseases. But its recent revival is yielding some frightening links to such problems as HEART DISEASE, STROKE, DIABETES, and PNEUMONIA.

HEART DISEASE- All other things being equal, people with periodontal disease are one and a half to two times as likely to suffer a fatal heart attack and nearly three times as likely to suffer a stroke as those without this oral disease. Studies have indicated that chronic oral infections can foster the development of clogged arteries and blood clots.

DIABETES- Recent studies strongly indicate that periodontitis can make diabetes worse. Experts now urge that periodontal disease be treated and eliminated in all people with diabetes. This treatment may reduce the risk of injury to the retina and arteries which is a common consequence of diabetes.

PNEUMONIA- Bacterial pneumonia results when bacteria that live in the mouth and throat are inhaled into the lungs where immune defenses fail to wipe them out. In addition, other respiratory diseases, like chronic bronchitis and emphysema, may be worsened by oral infections when the invading bacteria are inhaled.

INFECTIONS-People with artificial joints and heart valves are at increased risk of suffering a serious infection when periodontal bacteria enter the bloodstream. For those with artificial heart valves, the infection can be fatal unless promptly and thoroughly treated with antibiotics.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Of course, prevention is always the best bet. It starts with building and protecting one's bones.. This means having enough calcium in the diet to maximize bone development before age 30, when gradual bone loss begins. People with osteoporosis lose bone in the mouth as well as the hips and spine, and postmenopausal women who do not take hormone replacement have a greatly increased risk of periodontal disease. Keep in mind that early stages of periodontal disease often produce no symptoms. Talk to your dentist to see how you can get healthy and stay healthy!

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