

# Floss 'em or be flaccid

The links between oral disease and erectile dysfunction. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

**I**n the myriad of links between oral disease and systemic disease lies erectile dysfunction. According to a new study in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, men with erectile dysfunction (ED) are three times more likely to have gum disease than men who do not have ED. Why? Let's take a closer look.

ED is a vascular issue and is effected by any medical condition that causes blood vessels to narrow such as atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels.

Periodontal (gum) disease (PD) also damages blood vessels. Here's how: PD is a chronic, inflammatory disease caused by a bacterial infection. The gums and tooth-supporting bone structure disintegrate leading to tooth loss. By the time we see bone changes, the disease has already caused systemic inflamma-

tion, which sets fire to the lining of the blood vessels. To make matters worse, these dangerous bacteria can also seep into the blood stream, travel a distance and burrow into the damaged vessel walls to make a new nest and multiply.

There are a vast number of studies linking PD to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia and cancer. More study is necessary but for those who are skeptical I can tell you that the science experts are predicting PD to be more significant in overall health risks, not less.

In one study researchers found that 53 percent of the men who had ED also had chronic PD, whereas only 23 percent of men in the group without ED had gum disease. After adjusting for age and body mass index the study found that men with gum disease were 3.3 times more likely to have erectile dysfunction than those without!

Smoking is a significant factor in

erectile dysfunction also. One study showed that men who successfully quit smoking had more penile rigidity and reached maximal arousal five times faster than smokers who relapsed.

Do you need another reason to quit?

Smoking is one of the most significant risk factors in the development of PD as well as successful healing after periodontal disease treatment.

Attend to your gum health and get help with that tobacco addiction. To screen yourself for the possibility of PD visit SelfScreen.net.

Visit your dentist regularly and make sure you are getting a thorough periodontal examination at each preventive visit.

When I was graduating from dental school, 29 years ago this month, I would not have believed I would ever offer this advice: "To keep your marriage healthy for a lifetime, brush thoroughly at the gum line and keep on flossing!"



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## Our Mission Is:

- To treat each person with integrity, respect and kindness.
- To help each person take a significant step toward his/her desired oral and systemic health.
- To serve as leaders in our community in the quest toward whole-health promotion and the partnership between all health professionals.

