Healthy Gums.
Healthy You.
See your dentist regularly.

Why Discuss Heart Disease in a Dental Office?

Left untreated, gum disease can not only lead to tooth loss, but can increase your risk for other diseases linked to inflammation, including cardiovascular (heart) disease.

What is Gum Disease?

Periodontal (gum) disease begins when bacteria in plaque (a sticky biofilm that forms on teeth) produce toxins that irritate the gums. If the plaque is not removed daily through brushing and flossing, gum tissues may break down and become red, tender and likely to bleed. The early stage of periodontal disease (called gingivitis) is treatable and reversible. However, if left untreated, this condition may progress to a more serious condition called chronic periodontitis, a bacterial infection in the pockets around teeth. At this stage the bacteria and resulting tissue inflammation cause a breakdown of the gum tissue and bone, and eventually the teeth may become loose, fall out or need to be removed.

Warning Signs of Gum Disease

Regular dental visits will help your dentist detect early signs of gum disease and suggest treatment options. Warning signs of gum disease include:

- Gums that bleed during toothbrushing and flossing
- Red, swollen and tender gums
- Persistent bad breath or unpleasant taste in mouth
- Gums that have receded or pulled away from your teeth
- Loose or separating teeth
- Pus between the tooth and gum
- A change in your bite

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The Link to Heart Disease and Stroke

Evidence shows that mouth bacteria between the gum and tooth can enter the bloodstream, potentially attaching to blood vessels. This can increase the risk for heart disease, artery blockage and stroke. Other studies suggest that chronic inflammation can lead to dysfunction of the infected tissues, and severe health complications. Regardless, whether you have gum disease or heart disease, researchers today believe that having one may increase your risk for developing the other.

What You Can Do

Prevention is the key to maintaining good oral health and avoiding the risk of gum disease and other potential systemic conditions. Here are some suggestions for regular preventive care:

- Brush your teeth twice a day. Be sure to clean between teeth with floss or other type of interdental cleaner once a day.

- Schedule regular dental checkups. Routine dental visits (twice a year) can detect early signs of gum disease and provide early treatment options. More frequent professional cleanings to remove tartar along the gum line can be very beneficial in treating early forms of gum disease.

- Eat a balanced diet and limit snacks that may contribute to tooth decay and gum disease.

- Tell your dentist about changes in your health.

- If you smoke, seek help with quitting. Smoking can worsen gum problems.

- If you are pregnant, pay particular attention to your oral hygiene. Hormonal changes can exaggerate some dental problems.

The Prevention Connection

Put the bite on gum disease. Practice good oral care at home and schedule regular checkups with your dentist.

This Information Provided By

MINNESOTA DENTAL ASSOCIATION