

DENTAL HEALTH

What's Really At The Heart Of Dental Health?

(NAPS)—What's the way to someone's heart? You may be surprised to learn the answer could be "dental health." As the gateway to your body and all its major organs, including the heart, your oral health can also be a good indicator of your overall health.

This interconnectivity of our bodies is one reason Delta Dental of Washington has teamed with the American Heart Association's Healthy for Good movement to promote healthy smiles and healthy hearts.

The commonly followed rule is to visit the doctor once a year for a check-up and take a seat in the dentist's chair every six months for an exam and cleaning. Because of this, dentists are often your first line of defense in spotting issues by examining their patient's mouth, head and neck.

The vast majority—more than 90 percent—of common diseases show themselves through oral symptoms that dentists can detect. Heart disease—as well as anemia, diabetes, immune deficiency, and kidney failure—often have early oral warning signs. For instance, jaw pain, gum inflammation and sensitivity, loose teeth, receding or bleeding gums and pain with chewing can all be indicators of cardiovascular disease, but these warning signs do not necessarily mean an individual has cardiovascular disease.

Heart disease's most common manifestation, coronary artery disease, is caused by a plaque called atherosclerosis, which is made from cholesterol and fat. When left untreated, this plaque builds up and is cause for serious concern. That same build-up is the leading cause of heart attacks.

Gum disease, also known as periodontal disease, begins as an inflammatory gum infection called gingivitis. This is also due to a buildup of plaque, but on teeth and gums in the form of a sticky film of bacteria. While gingivitis progresses and develops, if left untreated, it may advance to periodontitis, where plaque perches in small pockets beneath the gum line and bone loss occurs.

The Connection—Although the diseases deal with different types of plaque,



Your smile could say something important about your heart.

research studies have found links between untreated periodontitis and an increased risk of heart infection due to the inflammatory responses of the body. As arteries become clogged by plaque and bacteria, they can narrow and harden, inhibiting oxygen-rich blood from reaching the heart. Researchers continue to study this link between gum disease and developing heart disease.

Keep Your Smile And Heart Healthy

Protecting yourself against complications relating to your oral health can be simple—if you know the warning signs of gum disease, you can address it before it advances to periodontitis. Maintaining healthy habits and nutritious diet choices also contribute to your oral and heart health.

"Your dentist plays an important role in detecting early signs of serious health conditions in the mouth, as well as conditions that affect the whole body," said Nadia Fugate, DMD, a licensed dentist who serves as a Delta Dental of Washington dental consultant. "These conditions might go undetected until health problems are advanced. When you see your dentist twice a year for checkups and practice daily oral hygiene, you and your dentist can be partners in prevention."

Seeing your dentist regularly to reduce plaque can help stop these health issues in their tracks. Think of your dentist as a disease detective. If you neglect your oral health, you could be neglecting your overall health as well.

Learn More

For further information about your oral health, visit Delta Dental of Washington's blog or www.deltadentalwa.com.