

Dental Care and Nutrition

Over 35 million Americans suffer from periodontal disease, and heart disease is the number one killer in this country, the link between these two diseases is becoming clearer. There is potential for lowering the risk of heart attack which has been linked to periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease is caused by bacteria and germs that live in the plaque on your teeth. For some time now, researchers have known that patients with periodontal disease were twice as likely to also suffer from heart disease. The bacteria that cause gum disease - cause platelets in the blood stream to clump together, raising the risk of heart attack. The study that discovered this used bacteria samples from patients' mouths and then introduced them to human blood platelets. Other studies have shown that when these bacteria are injected into the bloodstream, clotting occurs almost immediately.

We are aware of how poor nutrition choices can affect our weight and overall health, but those choices also have a dramatic impact on our oral health. Plaque buildup, and gum disease can be devastating, making proper nutritional choices can help prevent these oral problems. A poor diet promotes the perfect conditions for gum disease to develop. Foods containing high sugar and starches promote the production of bacteria which can be a perfect environment for gum disease to develop. A diet that is lacking nutrients wears the immune system down which makes it less able to fight off infections such as gum disease. Vitamins and minerals provide the body with the tools to build and renew bones, muscles, blood and tissue. Low vitamin and mineral intake means that the gum tissue and bones will not be as strong as they could be, therefore more susceptible to disease.

By making an effort to incorporate the vital nutrients that your body needs you will be helping yourself to fight off attacking bacteria all over your body, including your mouth. A body that is fueled properly with a healthy diet will be much better able to fight infection, those who have a poor diet full of sugars and starches will promote infection causing bacteria.

Here are some examples of healthy foods to incorporate into your diet:

- All natural fruit and vegetables high in vitamin C

- o Vitamin C is essential for building new cells and therefore promotes healthy gum tissue
- High fiber grains, vegetables, and fruit
 - o Fiber increases the flow of saliva which cleans the mouth, not allowing for harmful bacteria to build up and cause problems
- Minerals like magnesium and zinc in fish, poultry, lean meat
 - o These minerals promote healthy bone which includes the teeth
- Crunchy vegetables " celery, carrot, onion (eaten raw)
 - o Crunchy vegetables clean the teeth and massage the gums as you eat them providing a cleaning service at the same time as providing healthy nutrients.

Heart healthy supplement recommendations: Omega 3 fatty acids (from flax seed, fish, or krill oil) and a potent multi-vitamin.

Obviously foods such as pastries, cakes, sweets, chocolate, sweetened fruit juices and fizzy drinks are the types of food that are not good for preventing gum disease. Foods with a high sugar and starch content remain on the teeth for a long time. This provides a breeding ground for bacteria which thrive on the sugars found in food. If a poor diet is coupled with a poor oral hygiene routine then these bacteria will continue to thrive and the high levels of bacteria could eventually lead to gum disease. A consistent healthy eating plan rich in vitamins and minerals, fruit, vegetables, fiber and lean protein has been shown to help prevent plaque from developing in both the arteries as well as on your teeth.

The importance of oral hygiene

Making sure you brush your teeth both morning and night. This will ensure plaque build-up is kept to a minimum. You should brush at least twice daily without fail; after breakfast and before

bed. You should also floss once daily, preferably at night, to clear the little areas between your teeth of harmful food particles that will produce bacteria.

Make sure to drink plenty of water during the day to keep your mouth moist and able to clear away food particles before they have the chance to damage your teeth. There is no better prevention for any dental problem than a good dental hygiene routine, maintaining a healthy diet rich in vitamins/minerals, fiber, lean protein, fruits and vegetables, and scheduling regular teeth cleanings and checkups with your dentist.

Resources:

Center for Disease Control - <http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/>

United States Department of Agriculture-
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Topics/oralhealth.pdf>

American Heart Association- <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4436>

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www.gumdisease.co.uk