

## **The Pitfalls of Poor Dental Health Care**

The pitfalls of not properly caring for your teeth were well outlined in a recent article published in Prevention Magazine. In addition to the bad breath and gingivitis that results from a lack of brushing and flossing, several more serious health issues can arise.

Failure to take care of your oral health may adversely affect the heart, memory and breathing in addition to weakening the body's ability to control blood sugar and to become pregnant.

### **Proper Dental Care and Your Heart**

Coronary artery disease affects people with periodontitis, or gum disease, nearly twice as much as those who do not experience gum disease. While research has yet to clearly determine why this is true, it is thought that harmful mouth bacteria enters the bloodstream and attaches to fatty plaques in the heart's blood vessels. This leads to inflammation and increases the risk of heart attack triggering clots.

### **Proper Dental Care and Memory**

A link between poor oral health and an increased risk of dementia has been suggested through research. A study following 118 nuns (between ages 75 and 98) found that those with the fewest teeth were most likely to suffer dementia. The theory behind this is that oral bacteria may spread to the brain through the bloodstream or cranial nerves connected to the jaw. This may then contribute to the type of plaque that's been linked to Alzheimer's.

### **Proper Dental Care and Blood Sugar**

Those diagnosed with diabetes are more likely to have periodontal disease than those without diabetes. In addition to this being due to the fact that diabetics are more susceptible to infections, research also shows that gum disease could make it harder to control blood sugar; therefore, preventing or treating periodontal disease helps improve diabetes symptoms.

### **Proper Dental Care and Breathing**

The Journal of Periodontology reports that the risk of contracting respiratory infections, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia, increases if you have gum disease. This may be due to bacteria

from the mouth being inhaled into the lungs, possibly causing inflammation of the airways.

### **Proper Dental Care and Pregnancy**

Researchers in Western Australia discovered that women of childbearing age presenting with gum disease took an average of just over seven months to become pregnant, two months longer than the five-month average it took women without gum disease to conceive. Pregnant women with gum disease might have higher odds of miscarriage as well, according to further research.

There may still be dangerous bacteria growing inside your mouth even if you practice daily brushing. That could lead to an advanced form of gum disease known as periodontitis. To ensure proper oral health care, floss *before* brushing your teeth, use the correct toothbrush (soft or extra soft bristles are preferred) and brush wisely – brush for two full minutes, and include your tongue and cheeks. Following these simple directions will help maintain good oral health and avoid the pitfalls of bad health care.