



“Brush and floss. Avoid too many snacks. See your dentist regularly.”

How many times have you heard that? Now there are even more reasons to heed that advice. Taking good care of your teeth and gums isn't just about preventing cavities or bad breath.

The mouth is a window into the health of the body. It can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection. Systemic diseases—those that affect the entire body such as diabetes, AIDS and Sjogren's syndrome—may first become apparent because of mouth lesions or other oral problems.

The mouth is filled with countless bacteria, some linked to tooth decay and periodontal (gum) disease.

Researchers have found that periodontitis (the advanced form of gum disease that can cause tooth loss) is linked with other health problems such as cardiovascular disease, stroke and bacterial pneumonia. Likewise, pregnant women with periodontitis may be at increased risk for delivering pre-term and/or low-birthweight babies.

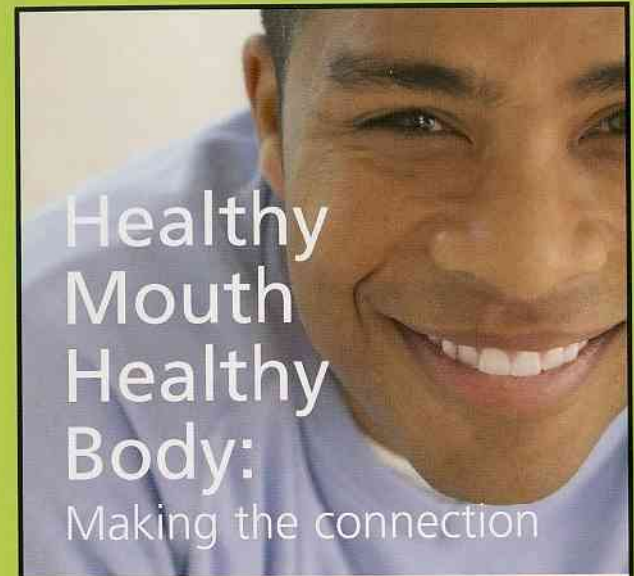


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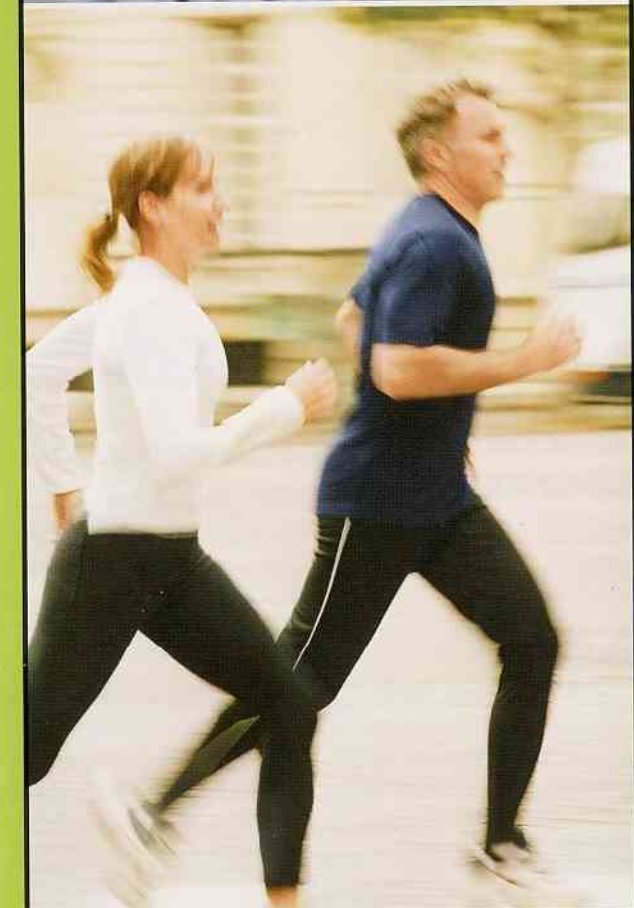
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**Healthy
Mouth
Healthy
Body:**
Making the connection



Exploring possible links

More studies are needed but some researchers suspect that bacteria and inflammation linked to periodontitis play a role in some systemic diseases or conditions. Likewise, diseases such as diabetes, blood cell disorders, HIV infections and AIDS can lower the body's resistance to infection, making periodontal diseases more severe.

Several studies link chronic inflammation from periodontitis with the development of cardiovascular problems. Some evidence suggests oral bacteria may be linked to heart disease, artery blockages and stroke.

People with diabetes often have periodontal disease. And diabetics are more likely to develop and have more severe periodontitis than non-diabetics. Some studies suggest periodontitis can make it more difficult for diabetics to control their blood sugar.

Although periodontitis may contribute to these health conditions, it's important to understand that just because two conditions occur at the same time doesn't necessarily mean one condition causes the other. That's why researchers are working hard, examining what happens when periodontitis is treated in individuals with these various health problems.

What you can do?

Given the potential link between periodontitis and systemic health problems, prevention may be an important step in maintaining overall health.

- > **Brush your teeth thoroughly twice a day.** Clean between your teeth with floss or another type of interdental cleaner once a day. You may consider or your dentist may recommend using an anti-microbial mouth rinse as part of your daily oral hygiene routine.

Periodontal Diseases: What you should know

Periodontal disease is a chronic infection caused by bacteria. It begins when certain bacteria in plaque (the sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on the teeth and tissues in the mouth) produce toxins and enzymes that irritate the gums. This causes inflammation if plaque is not removed daily.

Plaque that remains on teeth can irritate the gums, making them red, tender and likely to bleed. This condition, called gingivitis, can lead to more serious types of periodontal disease. Gingivitis can be reversed and gums kept

healthy by removing plaque every day with a good oral hygiene routine and by having your teeth professionally cleaned.

But if gingivitis is allowed to persist, it can progress to periodontitis, a chronic infection in the pockets around the teeth. The resulting inflammation, which may be painless, can damage the attachment of the gums and bone to the teeth. At this stage, treatment by a dentist is needed. Left untreated, teeth may eventually become loose, fall out or require removal by a dentist.



Healthy Gums



Gingivitis

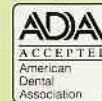


Periodontitis

If you notice any of these signs, see your dentist:

- > gums that bleed during brushing and flossing
- > red, swollen or tender gums
- > gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- > persistent bad breath
- > pus between your teeth and gums
- > loose or separating teeth
- > a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- > a change in the fit of partial dentures

- > **Choose dental products with the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance,** an important symbol of a dental product's safety and effectiveness. The ADA Seal represents extensive clinical and laboratory research for the dental products upon which it appears. The ADA Seal assures you that the product is not only safe but it does what it claims to do.



- > **Eat a balanced diet and limit snacks,** which may reduce your risk of tooth decay and gum disease.
- > **Schedule regular dental checkups.** Professional cleanings are the only way to remove tartar (calculus), which traps plaque bacteria along the gum line.

- > **Tell your dentist about changes in your overall health,** particularly any recent illnesses or chronic conditions. Provide an updated health history including medication use—both prescription and non-prescription products. If you use tobacco, talk to your dentist about options for quitting.

- > **If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant,** pay particular attention to your teeth and gums. That's because pregnancy—and the changing hormone levels that occur with it—can exaggerate some dental problems. Taking good care of your oral health is important for you and your baby.

For more information on oral health matters, visit www.ada.org.