

Oral Health can Affect General Health

You may have heard of the mouth-body connection. What goes on in your mouth can affect the rest of your body and what goes on in the rest of your body can have an effect on your mouth. In other words, *oral health* is important and connected to *general health* and well-being.

Links between oral and general health

The mouth is filled with numerous bacteria, including those linked to dental caries (tooth decay), periodontal (gum) disease, and systemic disease that affect general health. These bacteria are usually kept under control with good oral hygiene such as daily brushing and flossing. When harmful bacteria grow out of control, they can cause serious gum infections and provide a port of entry into the bloodstream.

The mouth is a window to your body's health

The mouth reflects signs and symptoms of health and disease. It can show signs of illnesses, general infections and nutritional deficiencies. The former Surgeon General, in a 2000 report on U.S. oral health, noted that “[a] physical examination of the mouth and face can reveal signs of disease, drug use, domestic physical abuse, harmful habits or addictions such as smoking and general health status.”

Oral health can affect other diseases and conditions

- Different studies have indicated an association between serious gum disease and certain diseases that affect the body, including diabetes and heart disease.
- The mouth may serve as a direct reservoir for bacterial contamination of the lungs with subsequent development of bacterial pneumonia.

- Pregnant women with gum disease are at an increased risk for pre-term births and low birth weight babies.
- Infection in the mouth can disrupt blood-sugar levels and make diabetes harder to control.



Diseases and conditions can affect your oral health

- People with weakened immune systems are more likely to get fungal and viral infections in the mouth.
- Some blood disorders, gastrointestinal disorders such as GERD (Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease), respiratory diseases and conditions can affect your oral health.
- Cardiovascular conditions, diabetes and pregnancy can affect your dental care and oral health.
- Medicine taken for other conditions may cause dry mouth, which can increase your risk of dental decay, oral yeast infections and other oral infections.
- Vitamin deficiencies can have serious effects on your mouth and teeth.
- Tobacco use and poor dietary practices can affect mouth and face.

Good health may start with your mouth

While oral diseases are important themselves, their relationship to overall general health is often overlooked by parents, health care and child care providers. Promotion of oral health and what you can do about oral health problems is an important step in maintaining overall health.

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Resources

Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General available online at www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/oralhealth/.

Systemic Diseases Caused by oral Infection. Clinical Microbiology review, Oct 2000.



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