

Dental Health Connected to Medical Problems

For some time, researchers have known that heart disease, stroke and other related diseases were connected to periodontal disease (an infection in the gums and bones that surround the teeth).

However, it is now becoming clear that periodontal disease is also associated with other types of medical problems. Below are some examples.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis literally means porous bone and refers to the deteriorating condition of the bones during aging. The relationship between osteoporosis and periodontal disease occurs because of the over-all weakening of bones, including the bones of the jaw and teeth. If one condition is present, the other should be suspected.

ULCERS

Poor oral health can be tied to any number of serious conditions including stomach ulcers and stomach cancer. The H. pylori bacterium associated with both stomach ulcers and stomach cancer can be found in abundance in the mouth of periodontal patients. What is even more chilling, is that H. pylori in the oral cavity can be easily transferred to other members of the periodontal patient's family, including children and infants. It

is imperative that the periodontal patient obtain treatment, for both his and his family's welfare.

PANCREATIC CANCER

One of the most deadly of cancers and the 4th leading cause of cancer death, pancreatic cancer has recently been linked to periodontal disease. All other things being equal, recent studies found men with periodontal disease were at 63% more risk for

developing pancreatic cancer than men without periodontal disease. This coupled with the fact that pancreatic cancer is very difficult to detect, emphasizes the importance of periodontal treatment in lowering risk factors associated with this cancer.

RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS AND PNEUMONIA

Just as bacterial toxins can transfer to the blood stream from

an infected mouth through swallowing or tooth brushing, these toxins can be aspirated into the lungs causing lower respiratory infections. In the case of the bacteria associated with pneumonia, the mouth may provide an ideal incubator. Dental plaque in patients with gum disease provides a nurturing environment for this bacteria which can then be aspirated to the lungs.

PREMATURE BIRTH

Premature babies and low birth-weight babies are born more often to mothers with gum disease than to mothers who do not have the disease. In fact, mothers with severe periodontal disease may have a seven-fold increased risk of premature labor.

PREMATURE DEATH

Premature death due to heart attack, stroke, diabetes, pancreatic cancer, weakened immune system, etc. can be caused or at least exacerbated by periodontal disease.

As more studies of the effects of gum disease weigh in, it becomes ever more clear that good overall health begins with good oral health.