

High Number of Medical Complications Associated with Periodontal Infections

Years ago, the major concern for patients with periodontal disease was the premature loss of their teeth. However, periodontal treatment now assumes a new urgency as the risk of ever more serious medical complications has become apparent.

Below are a number of medical problems associated with periodontal disease, an infection in the gums and bones surrounding the teeth.

HEART DISEASE

For many years, researchers have known that periodontal disease is connected to heart disease. Research has shown that patients with perio actually inject bacterial toxins into their bloodstreams. These toxins clog artery walls and therefore lead to heart attack.

But, there is good news! It is now clear that treating periodontal disease will actually lower the risk of heart disease.

STROKE

Inflammation brought on by the specific bacteria that cause gum disease has been shown to contribute to the build up of plaque in the arteries, a precursor to stroke.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is yet another factor associated with heart disease and stroke which can be traced to the presence in the blood stream of bacteria originating in the diseased tissues of the mouth. The relationship is clear; the more severe the periodontal disease, the higher the blood pressure reading.

OBESITY

Periodontal disease traditionally has been associated with middle or old age. However, obese young people in the 18-34 year old age group are 76% more likely to have periodontal disease. Although the obesity factor is not significant in the middle-age and old-age categories, it obviously affects younger people.

DIABETES

Untreated periodontal disease contributes to diabetes by inhibiting the body's capacity to naturally balance blood sugar levels, thereby interfering with normal treatment. When the bacteria associated with gum disease enters the blood stream, it can lower blood sugar levels, significantly increasing the severity of diabetes. It can inhibit diabetes treatment and even accelerate the progress of the disease.

CHOLESTEROL

An elevated level of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL), the so-called "bad" cholesterol, is a contributor to cardiovascular

disease. Physicians have long recognized the relationship between heart disease and high LDL cholesterol, but did not understand until recently the role that gum disease plays in raising the ratio of LDL cholesterol in the blood. By hindering the healthy enzyme activity which breaks down LDL, the bacteria associated with periodontal disease are thus a factor in increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEM

Whenever bacterial toxins are released into the blood stream from periodontitis, inflammation occurs; as the immune system is activated to battle the inflammation, the body becomes vulnerable to other outside infections. The health of the immune system can be seriously jeopardized when gum disease is neglected. In its weakened condition, the immune system is limited in its ability to ward off new adversaries.