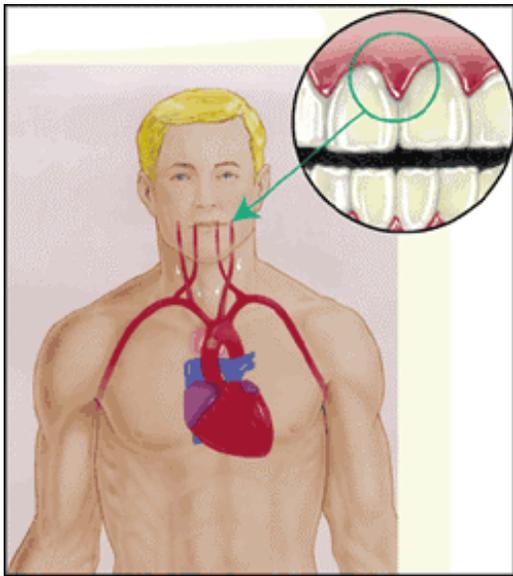


The Oral Health Connection



Gum Disease links to Heart Disease and Stroke

Heart Disease

Several theories exist to explain the link between periodontal disease (gum disease) and heart disease. One theory is that oral bacteria can affect the heart when they enter the blood stream, attaching to fatty plaques in the coronary arteries (heart blood vessels) and contributing to clot formation. Coronary artery disease is characterized by a thickening of the walls of the coronary arteries due to the buildup of fatty proteins. Blood clots can obstruct normal blood flow, restricting the amount of nutrients and oxygen required for the heart to function properly. This may lead to heart attacks.

Another possibility is that the inflammatory response caused by periodontal disease increases build up of plaque in the arteries leading to narrowing of the vessels.

Researchers have found that people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease as those without periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease can also exacerbate existing heart conditions. Achieving and maintaining optimal oral health is important to ones overall health and well being and may reduce the incidence of some cardiac infections such as infective (bacterial) endocarditis. Patients at risk for infective endocarditis may require antibiotics prior to dental procedures. Your dentist and cardiologist will be able to determine if your heart condition requires use of antibiotics prior to dental procedures.

Stroke

Additional studies have pointed to a relationship between periodontal disease and stroke. In one study that looked at the causal relationship of oral infection as a risk factor for stroke, people diagnosed with acute cerebrovascular ischemia were found more likely to have an oral infection when compared to those in the control group.

Tips

If you have heart disease, you have three oral health responsibilities:

1. Establish and maintain good oral hygiene practices (brushing and flossing at least 2 times a day)
2. Visit your dentist at least twice a year.
3. Make sure your dentist knows you have a heart problem.

Carefully follow your physician's and dentist's instructions when they prescribe special medications such as antibiotics.

Remember You can help prevent oral diseases.

Source:
American Academy of Periodontology [Internet] [last modified October 2008; cited 2010 Feb 22].
Available from: <http://www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.heart.htm>

