

ORAL HEALTH NEWS

A Newsletter from The Center for Oral Health

November 2000

From the Editor

In this issue of Oral Health News, I will share some recently-published information which relates gum disease with a number of significant systemic conditions. The notion that gum disease is a risk factor for some medical conditions is controversial, and not yet supported with conclusive scientific evidence. However, the anecdotal information is sufficient for us to consider the possible connections.



Robert A. Hersh, DDS

Your Overall Health and Periodontal Disease—The Links

In the last few years interesting links have been observed between gum disease and certain medical conditions. Heart disease, diabetes, the birth of low-weight babies and respiratory diseases all appear to be potentially influenced by gum problems. The primary relationship between gum disease and these conditions appears to be related to the increased presence of circulating bacteria in patients with periodontal problems.

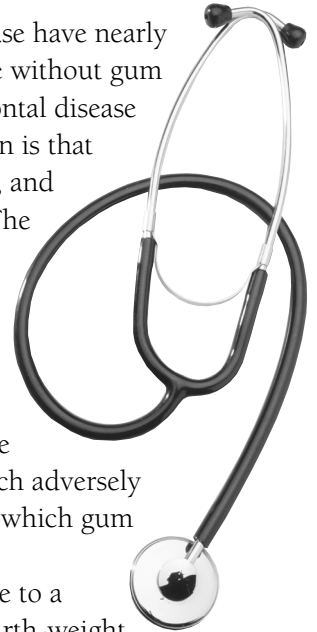
In the case of heart disease, people with gum disease have nearly twice the risk of having a fatal heart attack than people without gum problems. While the precise manner by which periodontal disease affects the heart is not clear, the most-likely explanation is that bacteria enter the bloodstream through diseased gums, and then cause small blood clots in the coronary arteries. The blood clots constrict the heart's blood vessels, decreasing blood flow to the heart muscle and increasing the likelihood of a heart attack.

For many years it has been recognized that people with diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease. Recent research suggests that patients with gum disease have more difficulty controlling their blood sugar, which adversely affects their diabetic condition. The precise manner in which gum disease influences blood sugar levels is not yet clear.

There are a number of factors which can contribute to a woman's increased risk of delivering premature, low-birth-weight babies. Smoking, alcohol and/or drug use, and infections all seem to be potentially hazardous to a newborn. Recent research reveals that pregnant women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a baby that is born too early and too small. The explanation for this finding is unclear, but chronic gum infection is a likely cause.

People who smoke, are elderly, or have suppressed immune systems are at increased risk for respiratory diseases, including pneumonia, bronchitis, emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Recent information appears to support the idea that gum disease may also increase the risk for respiratory disease. While the exact mechanism by which diseased gums contribute to respiratory disease is not yet known, the inhalation of bacteria from the gums may be involved.

For many years, periodontal disease has been a public health concern because of the potential of tooth loss. Now, recent information suggests that untreated gum disease may result in other serious additional health risks. So, maintaining healthy gums must be a priority in support of your total physical health. ♦



Time is Running Out!

Your annual dental insurance benefits expire December 31.

Any amount not used this year is lost, and cannot be carried over into 2001. So, if you require specific treatment and still have insurance benefits available for 2000, consider scheduling your needed care before year's end. ♦



We'd like to take this opportunity in our first newsletter to introduce our entire staff to you. Some of you may already know many of our staff members; allow us to acquaint you with all of them.

The first person you're likely to meet is Barbara, our outstanding office manager. She goes beyond the call of duty to assist you with insurance, accounting or scheduling questions. And, as an enthusiastic celebrant of all holidays, she is the one responsible for the festive decor in our office.

Lisa, Sue and Marcia, our extremely capable receptionists, are ready to schedule appointments, and answer any questions you may have regarding those appointments.

Our exceptional assistants, Stacey, Kanika and Bonnie, can help you with home care advice, answer treatment-related questions, and convey your concerns to Dr. Hersh.

The last important element is our hygiene department. Gail, Debbie, Josephine and Kelly are all experienced, skilled practitioners who can help you attain the highest level of periodontal health through thorough, yet gentle, cleanings and individualized home care instruction.

Please take the time to get to know our staff. We welcome the opportunity to help guide you toward achieving exceptional oral health. ❖

What's New at the Center

We have recently introduced digital x-rays into our practice. A digital x-ray is obtained with a special sensor instead of x-ray film. While an x-ray is taken in the conventional manner, the sensor picks up the x-ray information and sends it to a computer, where it is displayed on a monitor.

This is great news for you, since approximately 50% less x-ray radiation is delivered to the patient, because the sensor is much more sensitive than x-ray film. The advantage of this system to us is that we can, if necessary, change the contrast of the image and enlarge it, and even e-mail it to your restorative dentist for a real-time consultation. ❖



The Center for Oral Health provides a number of specialized services. *Periodontal Therapy* deals with the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the gums and supporting bone. *Dental Implants* involve the

placement of titanium anchors into the jaw to replace missing teeth. *Oral Medicine* is the diagnosis and treatment of conditions of the mouth and surrounding structures which have a medical link. ❖