

# Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

## Will Good Oral Hygiene Reduce Your Heart Failure Risk?

Heart disease is the top cause of death in the United States,<sup>1</sup> so finding ways to prevent it is critical. Most of us understand how important diet and exercise are to heart health, but your oral health may also play a role in reducing your risk for heart failure.

### Does Poor Oral Health Cause Heart Failure?

Poor oral health isn't a proven cause of heart failure, but that doesn't mean a link doesn't exist. It means researchers for years have studied how poor oral health contributes to diseases, including cardiovascular disease, but the results don't show a conclusive cause-and-effect association between the two.

Unlike diet and exercise, the link between heart disease and oral health isn't as clear cut – but evidence shows an association. And that's reason enough to explore how taking care of your oral health can also be a way of taking care of your heart health.

### The Link Between Oral Health and Heart Disease

The link between oral health and your heart is focused mainly on gum disease. Researchers have found a possible link between the advanced form of gum disease, which is known as periodontitis, and a greater risk of heart disease.

Gum disease is characterized by an overgrowth of bad bacteria in the mouth that initially infects your gum line. But this harmful bacteria can move from the mouth to other parts of the body – including your heart – by traveling through your bloodstream. When the bacteria reaches your heart, it can cause inflammation and clotting that may lead to heart failure.

One of the most severe symptoms of periodontitis is tooth loss, and this symptom is more common in older adults. One large study that looked at a million subjects with heart disease found a connection between tooth loss and coronary artery disease.<sup>2</sup>

## **More Research Needed, But Your Oral Health Is Still Crucial to Overall Health**

Although there is no proof that having poor oral health directly causes heart failure, there are links that suggest that neglecting your teeth and mouth can contribute to cardiovascular disease.

If you're looking for ways to improve your overall health, remember that having good oral health will help you lead a healthier life. Your mouth is a mirror into your total health, and for most of us, we see our dentist more than any other healthcare professional. Your dentist not only can spot cavities and gum disease, but also diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stress. The link between oral health and other medical diseases is of great interest to the research community, and your dentist can help you understand more about how your dental health impacts you well beyond your teeth and mouth.

Scheduling twice yearly preventive dental visits along with excellent at-home care that includes daily brushing and flossing will ensure that your oral health does not contribute to any disease elsewhere in your body. If you need help finding an in-network dentist in your neighborhood, Delta Dental of Iowa can help. You can search for one online with our Find a Provider tool or give us a call at the number on the back of your Delta Dental of Iowa ID card.

### **REFERENCES:**

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/index.htm>
2. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29461088/>

### **SOURCES:**

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/gum-disease-and-the-connection-to-heart-disease>

## **Can You Reverse Gum Damage?**

Gum disease – also known as periodontal disease – is a common oral health problem. Nearly half of American adults (47.2%) age 30 and older and 70% of those aged 65 and older have some form of it.<sup>1</sup>

Your gums are an important protector for your teeth because they surround and support each tooth. But when the gums become infected, they may pull back or recede. Instead of snugly hugging the tooth, infected gums create a pocket around the tooth, which allows bacteria to creep in and infect the area. Ultimately, this could lead to tooth loss because the gums aren't able to adequately support the teeth when they're infected.

If you start noticing that your gums are red, painful, puffy or bleeding, that's a sign to take action to prevent gum disease from getting worse. Fortunately, severe gum disease is preventable with the right treatment. Here's what you need to know to keep your gums healthy.

### **Gum Disease Basics**

Gum disease is caused by a buildup of plaque on your teeth and gums. Daily brushing and flossing helps remove plaque, which is one of the reasons why at-home oral hygiene is so important.

Plaque contains bacteria that can lead to infection. The signs of early stage gum disease (which your dentist may call gingivitis) include red, puffy gums that may bleed. As the infection progresses, the gums may begin to recede - and this allows the bacteria to move deeper toward the tooth root.

Advanced gum disease is called periodontitis. This most severe type of gum disease may lead to tooth loss because the gums are no longer able to help keep the teeth securely in place.

### **Can You Reverse Gum Damage?**

Here's some good news: Gum damage can be reversed, but it requires your dentist's help and strong at-home dental habits.

In some cases, you may not even realize you have early gum disease. This is why it's so important to see your dentist twice a year for preventive dental visits. Your dentist may detect signs of gum disease before you do and provide recommendations on how you can adjust your at-home dental routine to reverse any early damage.

You can also view these dental visits as hitting the reset button for your gums, because your dental team will work to clean your gum line by physically removing the plaque and tartar (tartar is hardened plaque). Removing the plaque and tartar off the gum line will help any infected gum tissue heal.

In some cases, your dentist may recommend a short course of medication to control bacteria and ease gum swelling. If all other non-surgical treatments haven't helped reduce the progression of your gum disease, you may need surgery to remove damaged gum tissue and prevent tooth loss.

In addition to your preventive dental visits, having good at-home habits, such as brushing and flossing twice daily and using an antibacterial mouthwash, will keep plaque from finding a home in your gum line.

### **Red, Inflamed Gums? It's Time to See Your Dentist**

The fact is, if your gums are painful, red, swollen or bleeding, they won't heal with good at-home dental hygiene alone. You'll need to see your dentist to understand the full extent of the gum disease and set the stage for healing to begin.

If you don't have a dentist, Delta Dental of Iowa can help you find an in-network provider near you. Easily search for a dentist online or give us a call at the number on the back of your Delta Dental of Iowa ID card.

### **REFERENCE:**

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/conditions/periodontal-disease.html>