

# A healthy smile may promote a healthy heart

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Each year, cardiovascular disease kills more Americans than cancer. And while most people are aware that lifestyle choices such as eating right, getting enough exercise and quitting smoking can help prevent cardiovascular disease, they may not know that by just brushing and flossing their teeth each day, they might also be avoiding this potentially lethal condition.

An article published in the December issue of the *Journal of Periodontology* (JOP), the official publication of the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP), suggests that periodontal patients whose bodies show evidence of a reaction to the bacteria associated with periodontitis may have an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

“Although there have been many studies associating gum disease with heart disease, what we have not known is exactly why this happens and under what circumstances,” said JOP editor Kenneth Kornman, DDS, PhD. “The findings of this new analysis of previously published studies suggest that the long-term effect of chronic periodontitis, such as extended bacterial exposure, may be what ultimately leads to cardiovascular disease.”

Researchers at Howard University identified 11 studies that had previously examined clinically-diagnosed periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease. The team then analyzed the participants’ level of systemic bacterial exposure, specifically looking for the presence of the bacteria associated with periodontal disease, as well as measuring various

biological indicators of bacterial exposure. They found that individuals with periodontal disease whose biomarkers showed increased bacterial exposure were more likely to develop coronary heart disease or atherogenesis (plaque formation in the arteries).

“While more research is needed to better understand the connection between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease, this study suggests the importance of taking care of your teeth and gums and how that can help you take care of your heart,” said Susan Karabin, DDS, President of the AAP. “With the number of people with heart disease continuing to increase, it is important to understand that simple activities like brushing and flossing twice a day, and regular visits to your dental professional can help lower your risk of other health conditions.”

Source: American Academy of Periodontology

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