

# Scientists find link between inflamed gums and heart disease

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The next person who reminds you to floss might be your cardiologist instead of your dentist. Scientists have known for some time that a protein associated with inflammation (called CRP) is elevated in people who are at risk for heart disease. But where's the inflammation coming from? A new research study by Italian and U.K. scientists published online in *The FASEB Journal* shows that infected gums may be one place. Indeed, proper dental hygiene should reduce the risk of atherosclerosis, stroke and heart disease independently of other measures, such as managing cholesterol.

"It has been long suspected that atherosclerosis is an inflammatory process, and that periodontal disease plays a role in atherosclerosis," said Mario Clerici, M.D., a senior researcher on the study. "Our study suggests that this is the case, and indicates that something as simple as taking good care of your teeth and gums can greatly reduce your risk of developing serious diseases."

To reach this conclusion, the scientists examined the carotid arteries of 35 otherwise healthy people (median age 46) with mild to moderate periodontal disease before and after having their periodontal disease treated. One year after treatment, the scientists observed a reduction in oral bacteria, immune inflammation and the thickening of the blood vessels associated with atherosclerosis.

"Because many Americans have some form of gum disease, this research can't be brushed aside," said Gerald Weissmann, M.D., Editor-in-Chief

of *The FASEB Journal*. "As it turns out, the health of our blood vessels could be hanging by the proverbial thread: dental floss."

Source: Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

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