

Maintaining healthy teeth and gums is a wise investment

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Faced with plummeting investments and an unsteady job market, many Americans are feeling the effects of the recent economic crisis. In fact, a recent study by the American Psychological Association found that over 80 percent of Americans rank money and the economy as significant causes of stress. And while chronic stress can lead to a host of health problems, including a weakened immune system and increased blood pressure, it can also take its toll on periodontal health. If left untreated, periodontal disease may result in even more serious, and potentially expensive, overall health complications.

Stress and your smile

According to David Cochran, DDS, PhD, President of the American Academy of Periodontology and Chair of the Department of Periodontics at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, stress can make an individual more susceptible to harmful habits that negatively impact oral health. "Stress may lead an individual to abuse tobacco or alcohol, and to possibly even neglect his or her oral hygiene. These lifestyle choices are known risk factors for the development of periodontal disease, which has been connected to several other chronic diseases, including heart disease and diabetes."

A study published in the February *Journal of Periodontology* (JOP) confirmed that stress may interfere with oral hygiene. In the study, 56 percent of participants self-reported that stress led them to neglect

regular brushing and flossing. In addition, the hormone cortisol may also play a role in the connection between stress and gum disease. Chronic stress is associated with higher and more prolonged levels of cortisol; previous research has found that increased amounts of cortisol in the bloodstream can lead to a more destructive form of periodontal disease.

"During periods of high stress such as what we are currently experiencing in this economic climate, individuals should seek healthy sources of relief such as regular exercise, eating a balanced diet, and getting adequate sleep," says Dr. Cochran. "Doing so can help maintain a healthy mouth, and potentially help ward off other negative health concerns."

Preserve your gum line, improve your bottom line

Reducing stress in an effort to avoid gum disease may not only help sustain overall health, but it might also help your pocketbook as well. A study published in the November 2007 *Journal of Periodontology* (JOP) found that preventing periodontal disease may be one way to help lower your total health care expenses. In the study, patients with severe periodontal disease had 21 percent higher health care costs as compared to those with no periodontal disease. Severe periodontal disease (periodontitis) involves bone loss and diminished tissue attachment around the teeth. And since past research has shown that periodontal disease may lead to other serious health conditions, striving to maintain oral health may help diminish the need to incur additional health care expenses, and ultimately help reduce overall health care spending.

"In these stressful times I encourage my patients to pay even more attention to their teeth and gums," says Dr. Cochran. "And in turn, since preventing gum disease may help reduce overall health care expenses, maintaining a healthy mouth may actually be a stress reliever in itself."

Source: American Academy of Periodontology

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