

Healthy gums may lead to healthy lungs

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Maintaining periodontal health may contribute to a healthy respiratory system, according to research published in the *Journal of Periodontology*. A new study suggests that periodontal disease may increase the risk for respiratory infections, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia. These infections, which are caused when bacteria from the upper throat are inhaled into the lower respiratory tract, can be severely debilitating and are one of the leading causes of death in the U.S.

The study included 200 participants between the ages of 20 and 60 with at least 20 natural teeth. Half of the participants were hospitalized patients with a respiratory disease such as pneumonia, COPD, or acute bronchitis, and the other half were healthy control subjects with no history of respiratory disease. Each participant underwent a comprehensive oral evaluation to measure periodontal health status.

The study found that patients with [respiratory diseases](#) had worse periodontal health than the control group, suggesting a relationship between respiratory disease and periodontal disease. Researchers suspect that the presence of oral pathogens associated with periodontal disease may increase a patient's risk of developing or exacerbating respiratory disease. However, the study authors note that additional studies are needed to more conclusively understand this link.

"Pulmonary diseases can be severely disabling and debilitating," says Donald S. Clem, DDS, President of the American Academy of Periodontology. "By working with your dentist or periodontist, you may

actually be able to prevent or diminish the progression of harmful diseases such as pneumonia or COPD. This study provides yet another example of how periodontal health plays a role in keeping other systems of the body healthy."

Periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the gum tissue and other structures supporting the teeth. Previous research has associated gum disease with other chronic inflammatory diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Dr. Clem stressed the importance of routine oral care in helping to prevent periodontal disease. "Taking good care of your periodontal health involves daily tooth brushing and flossing. You should also expect to get a comprehensive periodontal evaluation every year," he advised. A dental professional, such as a periodontist, a specialist in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of [gum disease](#), can conduct a comprehensive exam to assess your [periodontal disease](#) status.

More information: To assess your risk for periodontal disease or to learn more, visit perio.org

Provided by American Academy of Periodontology

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