

Periodontitis: The underestimated danger

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According to information from the World Health Organisation (WHO), periodontitis is one of the most frequent and underestimated common diseases worldwide. Although the loss of every second tooth is attributable to it, this disease, and its possible consequences, is still not being taken seriously. Corinna Bruckmann, periodontitis expert at the Bernhard Gottlieb University Dental Clinic at the MedUni Wien, also makes this point: "Current figures show that periodontitis escapes the subjective awareness of those affected, in older people even more so than in younger ones."

In a current study a routine, basic periodontal examination (BPE) was

carried out on 5,350 patients at the Bernhard Gottlieb University [Dental Clinic](#). Only 17 percent of them had attended the clinic owing to an already acute periodontal problem and the resulting pain. "However, varying with age group, problems in the gums were clinically ascertainable," according to Bruckmann.

Taking symptoms seriously

In the 18 to 34 age group 37 percent of people had obvious problems with their gums, in the 35 to 44 age group it was 58 percent and in the 45 to 64 age group as much as 78 percent and in older people it was even 79 percent. Says Bruckmann: "[Self awareness](#) did not match these figures at all. In the younger sample it was still at 41 percent, in the older ones it sank to 24 percent." The symptoms noticeable at the onset of the disease such as retreating gums, swelling, movement of the teeth, or bleeding when cleaning teeth, are apparently suppressed.

Periodontitis is an inflammatory disease of the structures holding the teeth in place. If not treated, it causes the loosening and subsequent loss of the tooth. The general state of health of the person affected can also sustain lasting damage as a result of [chronic inflammation](#) continuing for years. One risk factor for periodontitis is smoking. Smokers suffer from this more frequently than non-smokers. According to the WHO five to 15 percent of adults worldwide suffer from serious periodontitis.

And yet a large number of the periodontal disease cases could be prevented, or at least reduced in severity, by preventive measures and regular check-ups at the dentist's according to the expert.

"Unfortunately, the basic periodontal examination is not included in the catalogue of treatments payable by Austrian health insurance companies; inclusion in the list approved by the health insurance companies would be desirable," stresses Bruckmann. "The BPE would be a significant contribution to quality assurance so that periodontal disease with its

serious implications is not overlooked and patients can be directed to treatment in good time. At our clinic this examination is standard practice."

The aim of the treatment is the keeping of one's own teeth lifelong through measures such as combating inflammation, regeneration of the gums or reduction of the depth of the tooth pocket in the [gum](#). The treatment is based above all on changing the behaviour of patients, says Bruckmann, for example, by increasing oral hygiene, giving up smoking and the correct mindset in diabetic patients.

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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