

## PERIODONTAL DISEASE AND YOUR OVERALL HEALTH

In prior articles, I have discussed how periodontal disease affects the supporting structures of your teeth. With advanced periodontal disease, the bacterial plaque that accumulates on the teeth will cause an infection in the gums and a deterioration of the bone that supports and holds the teeth in place. The teeth then become loose and may need to be removed.

It has been shown that the effects of periodontal disease can also affect your overall health. People with periodontal disease are three times more likely to suffer heart attacks. Periodontal bacteria can produce direct blockages of the arteries of the heart or they can infect the liver, which then makes proteins that can clog the heart. For a long period of time, dentists have been using the guidelines of the American Heart Association to pre-medicate with antibiotics some higher risk patients prior to specific procedures. These patients include those with certain types of heart murmurs or heart valve problems.

It has been shown that periodontal bacteria can infect the heart valves and the lining of the heart causing a condition known as SBE or sub-acute bacterial endocarditis. For patients with these conditions, your dentist will pre-medicate you with the appropriate antibiotic. These antibiotics will then fight the bacteria that enter the bloodstream from the teeth through inflamed or bleeding gums. It has also been recommended that patients with recent joint replacements (i.e. knee or hip) should also be placed on antibiotics prior to certain treatment.

Other health concerns from periodontal disease are the association between periodontal disease and increased risk of stroke and respiratory disease. Some of the bacteria that cause stomach ulcers are found in bacterial plaque. It has been shown that patients who are diabetic have a more difficult time in controlling their diabetes. The bacteria from periodontal disease decrease the body's ability to manage insulin.

All infections including periodontal disease are a concern during pregnancy. Pre-term, low birth weight babies are also linked to periodontal disease. The bacteria associated with periodontal disease will enter the bloodstream. It is believed that these bacteria cause increased levels of fluids that induce labor. Fetuses that are not carried to full term will be underweight, which can have long-term adverse affects on the child.

Just as nutrition and proper digestion begins with the mouth, so can prevention of the risk factors for many diseases. Along with oral cancer screenings, proper oral hygiene and regular dental appointments, you can save more than your teeth. For more information on periodontal disease and the effects on your health, you can refer to The American Academy of Periodontology at [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org).