

THE ORAL-SYSTEMIC LINK

Periodontal (gum) disease is an inflammatory disease that is a result of the bacterial plaque around the teeth and below the gums. As bacterial plaque adheres to the teeth, they release toxins beneath the gum. The inflamed gum becomes a significant pathway for the bacteria to enter the general circulation. It is now recognized amongst the medical community that inflammatory processes triggered by periodontal disease are a risk factor for major medical conditions.

Currently, more and more research is being done on the oral-systemic link, or how periodontal disease affects a person's overall health. The body, through an extremely complex process, undergoes an inflammatory response caused by the entry of the bacteria and their toxins. In response, various types of inflammatory mediators are produced within the body. These mediators can have adverse effects on other systems or organs in the body.

One of the inflammatory mediators that may become elevated is C-reactive protein (CRP). CRP is a recognized risk marker for heart attacks. Some inflammatory mediators cause increases in insulin resistance, which in turn will adversely affect blood sugar control. Another inflammatory mediator can increase prostoglandins, which during pregnancy can lead to premature labor. Also, there are other mediators that stimulate the cells in bone that cause resorption of the bone, leading to osteoporosis.

Periodontitis is a risk factor for systemic diseases that can be modified or controlled. It makes far better sense to treat a problem before it occurs. Stated another way, proper diagnosis and treatment of periodontal disease can help prevent a visit to the hospital for a serious medical condition.

This explains why it is important to make regular visits to our office. In addition to examining your teeth and performing an oral cancer screening, we also thoroughly examine the health and condition of your gums. The color and texture of the gums are assessed as well as a detailed measurement of the depth of your gum pockets. X-rays are also invaluable for determining the bone levels around the teeth. We will then discuss the exam results and recommend any treatment (if it is warranted) for your periodontal condition.

Just as there are a variety of treatments for medical conditions, there are treatments to prevent and control periodontal disease. All treatment procedures, including routine dental cleanings, are geared to reduce and control the bacteria that cause periodontitis. If you have periodontitis, a variety of treatments are available to lower its adverse effects. By seeing a dentist on a regular basis and controlling and treating periodontal disease, you minimize a major inflammatory risk factor that adversely affects your overall health.