

CAMP HILL, Pa. (Feb. 15, 2023) — While gum disease can cause all kinds of oral health issues, research shows it can also affect your overall health. Recent studies point to connections between gum disease and systemic diseases like Alzheimer's, heart disease and diabetes.

According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, two in every five adults aged 30 years or older in the United States have some form of gum disease.

"Gum disease has varying levels of severity," said Roosevelt Allen, DDS, MAGD, ABGD, chief dental officer, United Concordia Dental. "The good news is that any damage is reversible if it's caught early enough. And future infections are preventable with good oral hygiene and regular dental cleanings — both are critical to keeping your gums and teeth healthy."



In advanced stages of gum disease, the inflammation caused by harmful bacteria and plaque buildup leads to gum recession, creating pockets or openings surrounding the teeth under the infected gumline. As the disease worsens, the body's immune system often responds by destroying the tissues and bone that hold the teeth in place, while the infection may travel to other areas of the body.

Gum disease and Alzheimer's

Two recent studies conducted by the National Institutes on Aging, and New York University College of Dentistry and Weill Cornell Medicine seem to support an association between the bacteria that cause gum disease and the development of Alzheimer's disease and dementias. An opinion-editorial for PennLive/Patriot-News and an article written for 50Plus Life by Dr. Allen last year provide more insight on the studies' finding, showing how taking good and consistent care of one's oral health now can help increase the likelihood of better overall health later in life.

Gum disease and heart disease

Several studies have found links between gum disease and heart disease. The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) notes that while gum disease is a risk factor for heart disease, there isn't a proven cause-and-effect relationship between the two. However, gum disease and tooth loss are known to boost stroke risk. And researchers at Harvard Health Publications suggest that inflammation in your body caused by gum disease may worsen heart disease.

Gum disease and diabetes

Diabetes affects the body's ability to process sugar, causing high blood sugar levels that can impact other areas of the body when left unmanaged. This means that diabetics are more prone to having infections and a greater inflammatory response, making them more likely to have gum disease. In turn, the inflammation and infection from gum disease raises blood sugar levels, making the diabetes difficult to control. Since early indicators of diabetes can be seen in one's oral health such as tooth decay and loss, dry mouth and gum infections, there's an opportunity for dentists to identify a significant number of the 8.5 million adults undiagnosed with the disease.

"What's clear from all of the research is that gum disease isn't just a mouth thing, it's a whole-body thing," added Dr. Allen. "If you have gum disease and another health issue, it's important to tell your dentist, so that a more personalized treatment plan can be developed."

To learn more about how the health of the mouth is connected to the health of the body, visit the Oral Health Resources section at [UnitedConcordia.com](https://www.unitedconcordia.com).

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