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## **Inflammation May Link Gum Disease and Other Illnesses**

*Chronic inflammation suspected in the link between gum disease and other diseases*

Brush after every meal. Floss daily. See your dental professional regularly. These instructions make sense coming from your dentist to help you keep your teeth and gums healthy. But now not only dentists, but also many physicians understand the importance of maintaining oral health in an effort to keep the rest of the body healthy. Several research studies have suggested a potential association between gum disease and other health issues, including heart disease, stroke and diabetes. As more and more research reinforces the connection between periodontal and systemic health, scientists are beginning to shift their focus to understanding *why* these connections exist. One theory points to chronic inflammation as the culprit.

Inflammation is the body's instinctive reaction to fight off infection, guard against injury or shield against irritation. Inflammation is often characterized by swelling, redness, heat and pain around the affected area. While inflammation initially intends to heal the body, over time, chronic inflammation can lead to dysfunction of the infected tissues, and therefore more severe health complications.

According to Dr. Kuljeet Mehta BDS, FDS RCS (Eng), MClintDent, MRD (Perio) RCS (Ed), periodontal disease is a classic example of an inflammatory disorder. "For many years, dental professionals believed that gum disease was solely the result of a bacterial infection caused by a build-up of plaque between the teeth and under the gums. While plaque accumulation is still a factor in the development and progression of gum disease, researchers now suspect that the more severe symptoms, namely swollen, bleeding gums; recession around the gum line, and loss of the bone that holds the teeth in place, may be caused by the chronic inflammatory response to the bacterial infection, rather than the bacteria itself."

Scientists hypothesize that this inflammatory response may be the cause behind the periodontal-systemic health link. Many of the diseases associated with periodontal disease are also considered to be systemic inflammatory disorders, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic kidney disease and even certain forms of cancer, suggesting that inflammation itself may be the basis for the connection.

"More research is needed to pinpoint the precise biological mechanisms responsible for the relationship between gum disease and other disease states," says Dr. Mehta. "However, previous findings have indicated that gum disease sufferers are at a higher risk for other diseases, making it more critical than ever to maintain periodontal health in order to achieve overall health."

Dr. Mehta recommends comprehensive daily oral care, including regular brushing and flossing, and routine visits to the dentist to avoid gum disease. If gum disease develops, a consultation with a dental professional, such as a periodontist, can lead to effective treatment. A periodontist is a dentist with three years of additional specialized training in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of gum disease.

For more information on the role of inflammation in oral health, tips on how to prevent or treat gum disease, to find out if you are at risk, visit

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