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Brush and Floss Your Way to Overall Health

Maintaining healthy teeth and gums can contribute to more than just oral health

Most people know that in order to live a healthy lifestyle, you must eat a balanced diet, get plenty of exercise, and avoid tobacco products. What many people don't realize is that tooth brushing and flossing are just as important in helping to maintain overall health. Routine oral care is the best way to prevent periodontal, or gum, disease. And since research has linked gum disease to several other diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis, maintaining periodontal health is more important than ever.

Periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory condition that affects not only the gums, but also the bone supporting the teeth. "If left untreated, it destroys the supporting bone and tissues that hold the teeth in the mouth," explained Dr. Kuljeet Mehta BDS, FDS RCS (Eng), MClinDent, MRD (Perio) RCS (Ed), a local periodontist and member of the American Academy of Periodontology. "Periodontal disease is the leading cause of tooth loss in adults."

The American Academy of Periodontology estimates that eight out of ten Americans suffer from some form of periodontal disease. "Because periodontal disease develops silently and painlessly, most people don't even know they have it, until it becomes advanced," said Dr. Mehta. "Research has suggested that periodontal disease is connected to a variety of other systemic diseases, so it is crucial that treatment of gum disease be sought as soon as possible."

There are several major signs that may signal periodontal disease. If you notice any of these symptoms, it is important to receive an evaluation from a dental professional:

- Gums that bleed easily during brushing or flossing.
- Red, swollen or tender gums.
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth.
- Persistent bad breath.
- Loose or separating teeth.
- A change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite.

While poor oral hygiene is a major cause of periodontal disease, there are a variety of other risk factors that can affect gum health. These include genetics, tobacco use, hormonal changes, stress, certain medications, poor nutrition, and the presence of other inflammatory diseases such as diabetes.

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 preventing periodontal disease in older adults, visit

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