

Leyla Weighs In: Worried about heart health? Take care of your teeth!



As a dietitian, some of the most important questions during my intake include an assessment of oral health. Poor dentition can put someone at nutritional risk due to reduced consumption of high fiber foods, instead opting for processed foods that are softer and easier to chew, but there is also the issue of gum health and inflammation.

The existence of gingivitis and periodontal disease must be considered where there's apparent inflammation elsewhere in the body. We worry about inflammation in our coronary arteries but some studies suggest that bacteria in our mouths may be the culprit. Meta-analyses have associated periodontal disease with elevated bacterial exposure, coronary heart disease and early atherogenesis. There are about 800 species of bacteria found in the oral cavity and periodontal disease is the most common condition in the population. This points to periodontitis as being a risk factor for coronary artery disease.

Certain microbiota associated with poor gum health, including *P. gingivalis*, *T. denticola* and *T. forsythia* are also associated with prediabetes and type 2 diabetes. Remember that these metabolic abnormalities contribute to atherosclerosis. In fact, those with prediabetes and frank diabetes progress as much as 70% faster to coronary

artery disease than those without such abnormalities. Indeed, you can almost call diabetes a form of heart disease.

It is known that those individuals with excellent oral health have a significantly lower risk of cardiovascular disease than those with poor oral health. And other evidence suggests that oral health and systemic disease are indeed linked—that a healthy mouth confers health benefits for the rest of the body, and vice versa.

Good oral hygiene (brushing and flossing) and supporting a healthy microbiome are key to good overall health.

To your health!

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