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Cardiovascular
Health at MDVIP

BE STRONG-HEARTED

CAN YOUR ORAL HEALTH AFFECT YOUR HEART HEALTH?

If you have gum disease, it could be affecting other parts of your body, including your heart. Although researchers have never found a cause and effect relationship between disease in your mouth and disease of your heart, there is ample evidence that the two are linked. And people with gum or periodontal disease have a higher risk for heart disease. They also may have a higher risk for type 2 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, psoriasis and respiratory infections.

How great is this risk? One study found that **individuals with gum disease were 49 percent more likely to have a heart attack than those without.**² Periodontal disease, which is usually caused by poor habits, is a common infection that leads to swollen, red and tender gums. Over time it can cause tooth loss.

But how can an infection in your mouth increase your risk for heart disease or type 2 diabetes? Researchers aren't completely sure, but they believe that when the body fights the bacteria that cause gum disease, **it raises inflammation throughout the body**³ — and systemic inflammation can increase your risk for a host of problems. Studies have observed a systematic increase in C-reactive protein, a marker for inflammation, in patients with periodontal disease.⁴

So does periodontal disease cause



47%

of Americans
have gum disease,
which increases risk of
heart disease¹

heart disease? Currently, research shows only an association between the two. In fact, some researchers suggest that the link may exist due more to poor lifestyle choices like smoking (which affects both oral and heart health) than to any potential cause and effect relationship. Basically, if you make regular unhealthy decisions, you're likely to damage your dental health AND your cardiovascular health.

Studies also haven't really shown that treating periodontal disease lowers your risk of heart disease.⁵ However, there are **plenty of studies that connect the two even when controlling for lifestyle choices.** And while treatment may not have been shown to directly lower your overall risk for heart disease, there are benefits to a cleaner mouth beyond aesthetics and fresher breath. One 2014 study found that patients who had their periodontal disease under

control, had fewer hospitalizations and lower medical expenses within four years of treatment compared with patients who weren't treated.

That's reason enough to discuss periodontal disease with your MDVIP-affiliated doctor and your dentist — and to do a better job of flossing and brushing.

In this guide, created as part of MDVIP's Year of Cardiovascular Health, you'll find:

- How to keep your teeth clean
- Tips for spotting periodontal disease

Go to [MDVIP.com/BeStrongHearted](https://www.mdvip.com/BeStrongHearted) to learn more about how you can protect your heart.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR TEETH CLEAN (AND YOUR HEART HEALTHY)

You know how to brush your teeth, right? You've been doing it for decades. But there's a good chance you're actually doing it wrong if you're trying to prevent decay, fillings, extractions and periodontal disease. That last one is important, because periodontal disease can raise your risk of heart disease.

Tooth decay is caused by a build-up of plaque, a thin film of bacteria that increases throughout the day on your teeth's hard enamel, its protective outer coating. Gum disease can occur and cause gingivitis when bacteria builds up along your gum line and under the gums. If you don't brush correctly and floss every day you can develop periodontitis, an infection that destroys gums and teeth and the tissue and bone that holds them in place.

For the best oral health and cleanest, whitest teeth, follow this Tooth Brushing 101 primer:

FREQUENCY AND DURATION

Many of us don't spend enough time brushing our teeth. The golden rule of thumb is Two by Two — to brush for two minutes, twice a day, in the morning as soon as you get out of bed

44%

of Americans over the age of 65 have an increased risk of CVD due to gum disease.⁶



and night right before you go to bed. It doesn't hurt to also brush your teeth in the middle of the day after lunch, when food can sit in your cavities and between your teeth all afternoon till you brush at night.

SOFT-BRISTLE TOOTHBRUSH

If you're using a medium or hard bristle brush thinking they clean your teeth better, switch to a soft bristle. It may seem counterintuitive, but a soft bristle brush cleans better and is more comfortable and gentle on your teeth. If you brush vigorously with a medium or hard bristle brush, you are more likely to damage the protective enamel coating on your teeth, your gums and root surface.

THE RIGHT TOOTHBRUSH

Size matters when it comes to buying a toothbrush that's right for you. You need to buy a size that you can comfortably maneuver around your mouth and that easily reaches all surfaces of your teeth, including the sides and behind your molars in the back. For most adults, the American Dental Association (ADA) recommends a toothbrush with a one-inch tall head that's half an inch wide as the most effective. Depending on the size of your mouth, large-head brushes may cause damage and hurt your gums, and small-head brushes may not be enough to cover the full surface of your teeth when you brush.

ELECTRIC VS. MANUAL

What about the pros and cons of a manual versus electric brush? Oral hygiene experts say that as long as you are using the correct brushing technique and cleaning your teeth twice a day, either is effective in keeping your gums healthy and reducing plaque build-up on the surface of your teeth that causes damaging bacteria growth. Per the ADA, you also need to get a new toothbrush at least every 3-4 months, or as soon as the bristles start fraying—and make sure you buy a toothbrush with the ADA Seal of approval that means it has been tested to be effective.

TECHNIQUE

You're likely brushing the tops and outer and inner surfaces of your teeth, but are you doing it at the right angle for truly keeping your teeth clean and plaque-free? The correct technique for brushing is to have your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your gums and brush gently back and forth across the surface of one tooth at a time in short, circular strokes using ADA Seal fluoride toothpaste. To clean the inside surface of your upper and lower front teeth, tilt your toothbrush vertically and use several up and down strokes on each tooth. Don't forget to also gently brush the surface of your tongue where bacteria linger.

FLOSSING

No matter how well you are brushing your teeth, food can still linger in the cracks between your teeth and along the gum line. The ADA and National Institutes of Health recommend flossing at least once a day and as often as after every meal, especially when you've eaten foods that are prone to leave pieces stuck in your teeth. Always remember to rinse after flossing, ideally with a fluoride mouthwash. If flossing hurts or consistently causes your gums to bleed, be sure to make an appointment with your dentist, as this can be an early warning sign of gingivitis.

EAT A WELL-BALANCED DIET

To help prevent oral issues, avoid sugary foods and soda, and eat mouth 'detergent' foods regularly. These include popcorn, apples, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, almonds and other crisp, hard vegetables that act as a natural bacteria exfoliant, scraping bacteria off your teeth; strawberries contain malic acid that dissolves superficial teeth stains; pineapple contains the enzyme bromelain that helps break up discoloration; raw onions have natural teeth whitening properties; and dairy products help increase saliva that breaks down enamel stains for whiter teeth.

To maximize the health of your teeth, gums and mouth and avoid oral diseases, follow these guidelines and be sure to see your dentist for regular check-ups and teeth cleaning at least once a year.



HOW TO SPOT GUM DISEASE

Your mouth is full of bacteria – good and bad. These bacteria along with other particles form a sticky substance on your teeth called plaque. When you brush or floss, you remove plaque, but whatever plaque is left behind hardens and becomes tartar. The tartar and plaque can irritate and inflame gums, forming pockets. More bacteria move in further irritating the gums. If left untreated it can result in periodontal disease. Here are seven signs of gum disease:

- Bad breath that won't go away
- Red or swollen gums
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Painful chewing
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth
- Receding gums or longer appearing teeth

SOURCES:

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