



There are many factors that can lead to having heart disease. But did you know that your oral health may affect your heart's health, too?

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How might my oral health affect my heart?

Growing evidence suggests that poor oral health may have an impact on your heart which may lead to a heart attack or stroke. While a direct connection has not yet been made, more studies are finding a link between periodontal (gum) disease and heart disease. In one study, the risk for heart disease among people with gum disease was nearly three times higher than those without it.¹

One theory for this link is that increased oral bacteria form plaque in the arteries, break off and lodge in the brain or heart. With heart disease the number one killer of both women and men, additional research is being pursued.² As a precaution, be sure to maintain good oral health and talk with your dentist about your risks.

What is good oral health?

- The first key to good oral health is to brush your teeth at least twice a day. This will remove any plaque and bacteria that has formed on your teeth throughout the day leading to healthier gums and teeth. Also, check with your dentist and see if there's a right toothbrush for - your dentists often suggest a soft-bristled brush.
- When it comes to technique, it's not how *hard* you brush, but *how* you brush. Be sure to brush all the surfaces between your teeth and gums. To best reach the outsides and insides of your teeth, hold your toothbrush at a 45-degree

angle to your gums and use short back-and-forth motions. Hold the brush vertically to reach the backs of upper and lower front teeth. Use a back-and-forth motion to clean the grooves of your teeth.

Removing food debris from your teeth ensures that sugar and acids don't wear down the enamel on your teeth, which leads to tooth decay. It also plays an important role of removing bacteria from your mouth that may lead to periodontal disease lowering your chances of infection.



- Second, use dental floss every day. Flossing removes tooth-decay causing plaque from places that your toothbrush can't reach, as well as food debris that, if left between your teeth, causes bad breath and leads to gum disease. Be sure to rinse your mouth when you have finished flossing. Talk to your dentist to see if an antibacterial mouthwash would be good for you.
- Finally, having a nutritious diet can contribute to good oral and overall health. Sweets, soft drinks and other non-nutritious foods can lead to tooth decay when bacteria in the mouth mix with the sugars in foods can make acids that attack the teeth. To help, you can brush after meals and limit snacking to

minimize this risk. Drinking water throughout the day also helps rinse the mouth and kills harsh acids.

- Maintaining good oral health also requires professional care. Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams and inform your dentist immediately if you experience any of the following conditions:

- red, swollen or tender gums
- bleeding while brushing or flossing
- gums that pull away from the teeth and/or loose or separating teeth
- red, white or swollen areas in any part of your mouth
- persistent bad breath

Alert your dentist if you are diabetic, pregnant, receiving chemotherapy or taking medications for a chronic medical condition, or if there has been any change in your health. Your dentist can help you manage oral conditions that may result from your medical condition.

Educating yourself on these and other important oral health topics will help you maintain a brighter smile and a healthier you!

Additional related information can be found on the Websites of the Academy of General Dentistry, www.agd.org and the American Dental Association, www.ada.org; and in Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000.



1. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006.