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Heart and Periodontal Diseases

When you think about your own risk for cardiovascular diseases, many things may come to mind such as fatty foods, lack of exercise, and genetics. However, you may not be aware of another possible factor, namely the periodontal diseases. Periodontitis is a bacterial infection of the gum and bone that support your teeth. Recent studies suggest that people with periodontitis may have nearly twice the risk of having a fatal heart attack as those without periodontitis.

There are several reasons why periodontal bacteria may affect your heart. In the presence of gum disease, normal tasks such as chewing or brushing your teeth may allow bacterial poisons to enter the bloodstream and irritate the blood vessel linings and/or enhance the chances that small blood clots will form and clog your arteries. Another possibility



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is that the inflammation caused by periodontitis may release chemicals into your blood that contribute to the buildup of fatty deposits inside your heart arteries.

Like high cholesterol, an elevated level of C-reactive protein (CRP) could be another reason as to why periodontitis could be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Periodontal diseases appear to trigger the liver to make proteins such as CRP that inflame arteries and cause blood clots that can lead to heart attacks.

For some time we've known that periodontal diseases can also aggravate certain kinds of existing heart conditions, especially when there has been previous damage to the heart. According to the American Heart Association, patients at risk for a disease called infective endocarditis may need to take antibiotics prior to dental procedures. A periodontist and cardiologist are able to determine if a heart condition requires use of antibiotics prior to dental procedures.

Because healthy gums may lead to a healthier body, see a periodontist for a periodontal evaluation, and begin taking care of your oral health today. You may be one beat closer to a happy heart and healthier body.