



## Periodontal Disease and Systemic Health

There is evidence to suggest that periodontal disease is a risk factor for several systemic health issues. Current research is focused on determining the strength of the association between periodontitis and overall health. Though it has not been proven that periodontal disease is a direct cause of the conditions below, there is strong statistical evidence to show that it can be a contributing factor. As more information emerges the importance of maintaining healthy gums is becoming clearer.

### Heart Disease and Stroke

Studies have revealed that people with periodontal disease have almost double the risk of coronary artery disease and that people diagnosed with stroke are more likely to have an oral infection. It is possible that when oral bacteria enter the blood stream, they contribute to clot formation by attaching to fatty plaques in the blood vessels of the heart. If these clots restrict blood flow, they can lead to heart attacks. As well, when clots break off (embolize) they can restrict blood flow elsewhere and cause strokes.

### Diabetes

Researchers have found that the relationship between diabetes and periodontal disease goes both ways: diabetics are more likely to have periodontal disease, and patients with periodontal disease have harder time controlling their diabetes. Thus, it is important for both diabetes and periodontal disease to be treated so that both conditions are kept under control.

### Respiratory Disease

It is believed that aspirating oral bacteria can cause lung damage and lead to bacterial respiratory infections. Patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) have a reduced ability to clear aspirated bacteria from their lungs. Researchers are exploring the association between periodontal disease and the frequency of respiratory infections in COPD patients.

### Pregnancy Issues

Having periodontal disease may increase the levels of inflammatory markers that induce labour. This could explain the results of early research showing that women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a premature baby with a low birth weight. The risk of early delivery increases if the periodontal disease worsens during pregnancy.

### Osteoporosis

Many studies have shown that persons with a low bone mineral density are more likely to have tooth loss, periodontal disease and oral bone loss. The use of hormone replacement therapy may help protect against these effects. Current studies are exploring whether the increase in inflammation caused by periodontal disease contributes to the development or progression of osteoporosis.

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