

## **Your Oral Health and Overall Health**

Researchers have found that periodontitis (the advanced form of gum disease that can cause tooth loss) is associated with other health problems such as cardiovascular disease, stroke and bacterial pneumonia. Likewise, pregnant women who have periodontitis may be at increased risk for delivering pre-term and/or low birth weight babies.

Although reports suggest that periodontitis may contribute to these conditions, it is important to understand that just because two conditions occur at the same time, doesn't necessarily mean that one condition causes the other. The relationship could work the other way. For example, there is evidence that diabetics are more likely to develop periodontitis and have more severe periodontitis than nondiabetics. Or two conditions that occur together may be caused by a third factor. People who smoke or use alcohol are at increased risk of developing periodontitis and a number of other health conditions, including oral cancer.

Researchers are working hard to find out if periodontitis does have an effect on other health problems by looking at what happens when periodontitis is treated in individuals with these problems. If there was a cause and effect relationship, we would expect that a treatment that leads to an improvement in periodontal health would also improve other health problems. The results from initial studies are intriguing. For example, some studies suggest that treating periodontitis in people with diabetes can improve their blood sugar control, but other studies have not found this connection.

Given the potential link between periodontitis and systemic health problems, prevention of periodontitis may turn out to be an important step in maintaining overall health. In most cases, good oral health can be maintained with good daily oral hygiene (brushing and flossing) and regular professional care.

Tell your dentist about your overall health, especially if you have had any recent illnesses or have any chronic conditions. Provide a health history including medication use, both prescription and over-the-counter products, and let your dentist know when there are changes. Also, if you smoke, talk to your dentist about options for quitting smoking. This will help ensure that you get the most complete and appropriate care.

For more information on the connection between oral and overall health, you may be interested in the resources found in the You and Your Dentist section of [ADA.org](http://ADA.org).

