

Healthy Outlook Blog

Viewpoints: Two Experts' Takes on the Heart/Gum Health Link

By Sue Russell | Posted June 27 2012

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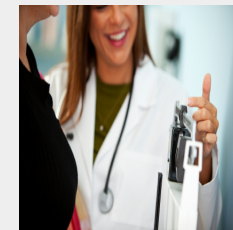
A recent American Heart Association statement confirmed powerful evidence of an independent association between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease. But it also reported that there is no proof yet that the former causes the latter. That has led to misleading headlines like “[Gum Disease Doesn't Cause Heart Disease After All](#)” and

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[The Anti-Diet: Winning the War on Obesity](#)

The obesity problem is huge, literally. A new report funded by the CDC estimates that 42 percent of American adults could be obese by the year 2030, compared to 33.8 percent in 2007-2008. Obesity is responsible for staggering costs: an extra \$190 billion a year in healthcare and more than \$73 billion a year in lost

public confusion.

We asked [Dr. Bradley Bale](#) of the Heart Attack and Stroke Prevention Center in Spokane, Washington and [Pamela McClain](#), DDS, in practice in Aurora, Colorado and President of the [American Academy of Periodontology](#), to share their viewpoints.

Does the lack of proof that periodontal disease causes cardiovascular disease mean oral care is no longer so critical?

Dr. McClain: Many research studies have shown that gum disease is independently associated with heart disease, similar to the way obesity or tobacco use is associated. This means that having gum disease may increase your risk for heart disease, similar to how obesity or smoking may.

Therefore, even though we currently cannot say that periodontal disease causes heart disease, it is crucial that patients understand that the two are linked and that maintaining healthy teeth and gums may help reduce their chances of developing heart disease.

Dr. Bale: Individuals need to be very concerned about their oral health. The recent AHA article concluded that periodontal disease (PD) is associated with increased cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk even after adjusting for all other known risk factors such as diabetes, obesity, smoking, diet, etc.

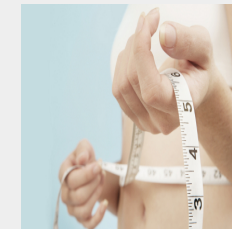
This conclusion was supported scientifically by the strongest evidence possible. Unfortunately, attention to this very important conclusion was diverted by the article's other conclusion that a definite cause-and-effect relationship between PD and CVD has not yet been established.

Since the AHA article was formulated, two excellent studies ([here](#) and [here](#)) were published which indicated systemic inflammation is a cause of CVD. The AHA article

productivity.

10-Year-Old Twins Win Award for Hip-Hop Hand-Washing Routine

Who knew that a rap song about hand hygiene could be so entertaining? Twin brothers Jerry and Josie Herman won the second annual Film Festival, held during the 39th Annual Educational Conference & Annual Meeting of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology. Jerry spent several months at All Children's Hospital in St. [...]



Weight Loss May Reduce Inflammation and Disease Risk

The takeaway, Dr. McTiernan says, is that losing 5 percent to 10 percent of excess weight is enough to significantly reduce the body's inflammation molecules, thereby reducing the risk of cancer and other diseases.

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did comment on PD being strongly associated with systemic inflammation—further reason for people to realize maintaining excellent oral health is important in attempts to combat CVD risk.

Do you discuss the heart disease/oral health connection with patients?

Dr. McClain: I inform all my patients about the relationship between periodontal disease and other diseases, including diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and heart disease. It is important they understand that research has indicated that gum disease is associated with these other diseases. I encourage patients to keep all healthcare professionals...medical and dental...informed of any changes in their health history.

Dr. Bale: Minimizing heart disease risk—and preventing heart attacks—requires a holistic approach and all known associated risk factors are discussed (with our patients) and evaluated...those issues include not only diet, exercise, sleep, anxiety, weight, smoking, cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, but also oral health.

Do cardiologists routinely examine patients' mouths and periodontists routinely ask about patients' heart health?

Dr. Bale: Each of our patients is evaluated for loose teeth, inflamed gums, bleeding gums, recession of gum tissue, missing teeth, abnormal growths and halitosis.

Dr. McClain: Periodontists will typically ask patients about heart health and family history.

Might better collaboration by cardiologists and periodontists help cut heart disease risk?

Dr. Bale: There is a huge need. Long gone are the days when people can believe it simply takes good cholesterol control to derive cardiovascular wellness. We have over

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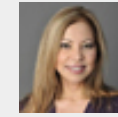
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60,000 miles of arteries in our bodies and they literally travel everywhere. Inflammation appears to be causal in the development and progression of CVD.

Inflammation can be a manifestation of numerous conditions including: obesity, poor diet, stress, lack of sleep, pre-diabetes and diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, periodontal disease, etc. Inflammation can arise anywhere in our bodies. All healthcare specialties have the potential to play a role in our arterial health. This certainly includes oral health.

Dr. McClain: Periodontists are dentistry's experts in managing oral inflammation which is what many experts believe is responsible for the "perio-systemic link," or the link between periodontal disease and other systemic diseases.

Therefore, periodontists need to know as much as possible about what other health factors could be contributing to a patient's inflammatory burden. Long-term interventional studies are needed to better understand the specific nature of the relationship.

Dr. Bale: Bottom line: All CVD wellness programs need to incorporate oral health measures and embrace this as one of many holistic measures designed to remove CVD from its current position as the number one killer and disabler.

CONNECT THE DOTS

Try out this heart attack risk assessment [tool](#). Assess your risk of gum disease [here](#). Read the AHA [statement](#). You may also like these related articles: "[The Mouth-Body Connection: How Periodontal Disease Can Affect Health](#)," and "[Healthy Gums Could Prevent a Heart Attack](#)."



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