

Healthy mouth, healthy body

Making the connection

Exploring possible links

More studies are needed, but some researchers suspect that bacteria and inflammation linked to periodontitis (gum disease) play a role in some systemic diseases or conditions. Likewise, diseases such as diabetes, blood cell disorders, HIV infections, and AIDS can lower the body's resistance to infection, making periodontal diseases more severe.

Several studies link chronic inflammation from periodontitis with the development of cardiovascular problems. Some evidence suggests oral bacteria may be linked to heart disease, artery blockages, and stroke.

People with diabetes often have periodontal disease. Diabetics are also more likely to develop and have more severe periodontitis than nondiabetics. Some studies suggest periodontitis can make it more difficult for diabetics to control their blood sugar.

Although periodontitis may contribute to these health conditions, it's important to understand that just because two conditions occur at the same time doesn't necessarily mean one condition causes the other. That's why researchers are working hard, examining what happens when periodontitis is treated in individuals with these various health problems.

Periodontal disease—what you should know

Periodontal disease is a chronic infection caused by bacteria. It begins when certain bacteria in plaque (the sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on the teeth and tissues in the mouth) produce toxins and enzymes that irritate the gums. This causes inflammation if plaque is not removed daily.

Plaque that remains on teeth can irritate the gums, making them red, tender, and likely to bleed. This condition, called gingivitis, can lead to more serious types of periodontal disease. Gingivitis can be reversed and the gums kept healthy by removing plaque every day with a good oral-hygiene routine and by having your teeth professionally cleaned.

But if gingivitis is allowed to persist, it can progress to periodontitis, a chronic infection in the pockets around the teeth. The resulting inflammation, which may be painless, can damage the attachment of the gums and supporting bone of the teeth. At this stage, treatment by a dentist is needed. Left untreated, teeth may eventually become loose, fall out, or require removal by a dentist.

If you notice any of these signs, you require a dental examination:

- **gums that bleed during brushing and flossing**
- **red, swollen, or tender gums**
- **gums that have pulled away from your teeth**
- **persistent bad breath**
- **pus between your teeth and gums**
- **loose or separating teeth**
- **a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite**
- **a change in the fit of partial dentures**

Call **Dr. Gerber** at **(310) 652-0450** for more information or to schedule a dental examination.

