Can Heartburn Meds Reduce Gum Disease Severity?

Drugs prescribed for gastrointestinal disorders might help prevent gum tissue pockets from deepening.

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Healthy oral care requires that people avoid plaque buildup on their teeth, especially at the gumline. In a surprising finding, new research published in the journal Clinical and Experimental Dental Research shows that patients who also use proton pump inhibitors (PPI)—a class of meds used to treat heartburn, acid-reflux and ulcers—can help the gums stay tightly fitted against the teeth for optimal oral health, reports a press release about a recent study out of the University at Buffalo.

Periodontal pockets, deep spaces between the teeth and gums, are a telltale sign of gum disease. The gaps are ideal locations for plaque from bacteria in the mouth to build up; left untreated, this can lead to gingivitis—the first stage of periodontitis, or gum disease.

For the study, researchers reviewed the oral health records of 1,093 dental patients ages 18 and older. Scientists divided the participants into two groups. In the first set, scientists excluded smokers and people with diabetes and classified this group NS/ND. Then researchers collected the following data from individuals: measurements from six areas around each tooth, plaque scores, PPI status and medical and demographic information.

In the second group, investigators ruled out patients who previously underwent chemotherapy, hormone replacement therapy or used steroids and those with a history of rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus and labeled them the NS/ND/NMed grouping.

Results from the evaluation of information from the first set of participants showed that among people who took PPIs, 14% showed teeth with gum pocket depths of 6 millimeters or greater compared with 24% of the teeth of those who did not use these meds.

The data assessment for the second group showed that 27% of the teeth of patients who used PPIs registered gum pocket depths of 5 millimeters or more compared with 40% of the teeth of non-PPI users.

Researchers suggested that PPIs' ability to change bone metabolism or the gut microbiome might

help explain their effect on gum disease severity.

“PPIs could potentially be used in combination with other periodontal treatments; however, additional studies are first needed to understand the underlying mechanisms behind the role PPIs play in reducing the severity of periodontitis,” said Lisa M. Yerke, a clinical assistant professor in the department of periodontics and endodontics at the University of Buffalo’s School of Dental Medicine.

To learn more about how to prevent gum disease, read "These Dental Care Tools Have Been Proved to Stop Gum Disease."

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