These Dental Care Tools Have Been Proved to Stop Gum Disease

Specific toothbrushes, water picks and mouth rinses significantly reduce the plaque buildup that leads to gum disease.

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Gum disease and decaying teeth are the biggest risk factors for tooth loss. To combat these problems, many people arm themselves with various dental hygiene tools reputed to be effective. But which ones really work? New study findings published in the Journal of the International Academy of Periodontology offer definitive answers via a comprehensive review of gum disease prevention products and techniques currently available, reports a University at Buffalo press release.

Gum disease, also called periodontal disease, which affects over half of people over 30, results from infection and inflammation of the gums and bone that surround the teeth.

For the investigation, researchers from the University at Buffalo assessed evidence from a collection of study summaries to identify the self-care methods most effective at stopping periodontal disease.

Researchers focused on studies of adult men and women with acute and chronic gingivitis, periodontitis and periodontal disease as well as studies on primary preventions for these dental problems. In addition, they evaluated methods used at home by individuals or by dental hygienists to manage dental plaque, measure gum inflammation and the depth of spaces called pockets around the teeth under the gumline where disease-causing bacteria can proliferate.

Results showed that only a few of the dental care tools for consumers, such as manual and interdental toothbrushes, water picks and mouth rinses with chlorhexidine gluconate or cetylpyridinium chloride or those with essential oils, such as Listerine, which contains a mix of eucalyptol, menthol, thymol and methyl salicylate—sourced from wintergreen leaves—were effective in fighting periodontal disease and related dental issues.

“Patients can be confident that the oral care tools and practices supported by research, as described in the paper, will prevent the initiation and progression of periodontal disease, if they are performed regularly and properly,” says Frank Scannapieco, DMD, PhD, the chair of the oral biology department in the university’s school of dental medicine.

Interestingly, there was no evidence to show that electric toothbrushes were better than basic toothbrushes at removing plaque and preventing gum disease. In addition, flossing, probiotics and other dietary supplements, professional plaque removal (scaling) and mouthwashes made with hydrogen peroxide, tea tree oil, green tea and fluoride, among other ingredients, were also unproven methods.

But don't toss your floss, cautioned researchers.

"While there are few studies available that specifically examined toothbrushes or floss alone, both are still essential," Scannapieco explained. "Floss is especially useful to remove interdental plaque for people who have tight space between their teeth. Floss also likely reduces the risk for cavities that form between the teeth."

To learn more basics about good oral care, read "8 Tips to Help Your Teeth Last a Lifetime."

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