What's Behind Your Smile?

The critical connection between oral health and overall wellness.

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"More than 90 percent of systemic conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, are linked to symptoms in the mouth," says Nargiz Schmidt, DDS, a New York prosthodontist who specializes in cosmetic and reconstructive dentistry.

For example, malaligned or loose teeth can signal osteoporosis; discoloration can be caused by severe nutritional deficiencies and bulimia; and missing teeth can mean that the patient has diabetes. "Diabetes, mainly uncontrolled diabetes, can be a major factor in a person's ability to fight oral infection," explains Dr. Schmidt. "If a person has diabetes, they often cannot fight the bacteria that causes gum disease and, therefore, develop uncontrolled gum disease as a result."

Donna Williams, DDS, a practicing dentist for 18 years in Harlem, New York City, says, "At my office, prediabetic and diabetic conditions are frequently diagnosed in my patients, and I've had several patients who were diagnosed with heart conditions. My office frequently refers patients to their physicians to encourage an overall medical checkup because we recognize the strong correlation between dental health and overall well-being."

According to Schmidt, "When someone has chronic gum inflammation, I take it as a significant indicator that the person may have a number of diseases. Pericoronitis, an infection in the gum tissue around a tooth, is very difficult to treat without removing parts of the gum—or even a tooth—and is a precursor to very serious heart illness. It's a painful infection that causes gum tissue, often around wisdom teeth, to swell, though it can appear in any situation where food or plaque gets caught underneath a flap of gum. That infection provides a gateway for the bacteria in the mouth to travel directly into the bloodstream, and likely into the heart.

"Pericoronitis is the strongest predictor of coronary disease—a fact of which many people are unaware," Schmidt continues. Bleeding gums and other fungal infections can mar a smile but are also among the most infamous oral signs clueing dentists into other serious health issues, like diabetes, leukemia and HIV."

PASS THE MINTS, PLEASE!
Or better yet, find out the root cause of your bad breath

We use gum, mints, mouthwash or anything we can find to disguise the odor of bad breath. But whether you call it bad breath or halitosis, it is not just a social embarrassment. Halitosis should not be ignored because it “is frequently the outward manifestation of a more serious health condition,” says Dr. Williams.

According to the American Dental Association (ADA), health conditions that trigger simple bad breath include local infections in the respiratory tract, gastrointestinal problems, chronic sinusitis, chronic bronchitis, postnasal drip and liver and kidney diseases.

To combat chronic bad breath, the ADA recommends scheduling a checkup with your dentist to determine whether gum disease caused the problem and whether you need a referral to your family physician.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/oral-health-wellness-15234-4210