



The Whole Body *Connection*

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The establishment of the Western world's first professional dental school united these disparate disciplines; however, it was a mixed blessing. While it was a positive development in many ways, it meant that dental and medical schools would become separate faculties. More recently, study upon study is finding that the health of our body has an impact on the health of our mouth and visa versa.

Scientists are only just beginning to understand the role of inflammation in whole body health.

They are gradually gaining a better appreciation, for instance, of the links between periodontal disease and other serious health issues, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and pregnancy complications, including miscarriages and premature births. Physicians agree the patients who have undergone organ transplants or other major medical interventions have a great chance for successful recovery if they maintain good oral health before and after their operation. Good oral health has also been cited as one of the conditions for a longer life-adding as much as 6.4 years.

Supporting Evidence:

- Scientific American devoted an entire issue on The Mouth Body Connection
- Former U.S Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher called gum disease “the silent epidemic” in his 2000 report. The report on Oral Health in America (2000) concluded that oral health and general health are inseparable and that oral health is integral to general health. It recognized the mouth as a portal of entry for infections that can spread to other parts of the body and acknowledged a need to change non dental healthcare providers' perception of the importance of oral health.

The year was 1840 – a pivotal time for dentistry and human health in general. Two enterprising dental health practitioners, Drs. Horace Hayden and Chapin Harris, founded the world's first dental college at the University of Maryland. Until the establishment of this school, oral health fell within the domain of two very different sorts of practitioners. On the one hand, barbers or tradesman pulled rotting teeth and help fashion dental appliances like bridges and dentures. On the other elite practitioners specialized in dentistry.

- It is the potential damage to various systems of the body that makes the diagnosis and treatment of gum disease an ongoing and life-altering endeavor.
- Diabetes is a chronic lifelong illness. Approximately 6.8% of the population has been diagnosed with diabetes, while another 20% is considered "pre-diabetic", or on the verge of developing diabetes. It is projected the number of people with diabetes will increase to 8.9% by 2020. The good news: studies show that the treatment of periodontal disease has the potential to improve glucose control and reduce insulin requirements.
- A UC Berkeley study published in 2010 by a researcher suggests that women who receive regular dental care reduce their risk of heart attacks, stroke and other cardiovascular problems by at least one-third.
- Oral Spirochetes have now been found in autopsies of Alzheimer's patients' brains, causing destruction around their location.
- There can be as many oral bacteria in the human mouth as there are cells in the body. Over 500 species have been identified.

We as a profession have an opportunity to share this connection with our patients as they often visit the dental office more than their medical doctors. We also have a longer time interval to educate and enforce good hygiene.

On a daily basis, added value to the quality of the dental visit can include: educating about how the majority of oral bacteria flourishes on the tongue surface, thus

demonstrating the importance of regularly cleaning our tongues. It is also important to describe how periodontal disease can alter pathways in the immune system that may be harmful to other systems in the body. We need to constantly reinforce this information as research shows that people need to hear statistics several times to retain the shared information.

We can link the growing list of risk factors for periodontal disease with the individual;

- Smoking (the number one risk factor)
- Diabetes
- Genetics
- Age
- Stress
- Lower income and less education
- Inactivity
- Osteoporosis
- Immune disorders
- Hormonal influences
- H. pylori infections
- Contact with others' saliva
- Dietary deficiencies
- Chronic kidney disease
- HIV
- Use of some prescription medications

And the good news is that a positive reinforcement is to remind our patients that smiling releases endorphins. Psycho-neuro-immunology has discovered that the receptors to activate the muscles to smile are in the limbic brain, where endorphins are also released! Our smile is our very best natural vitamin. A positive mouth body connection! DT

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