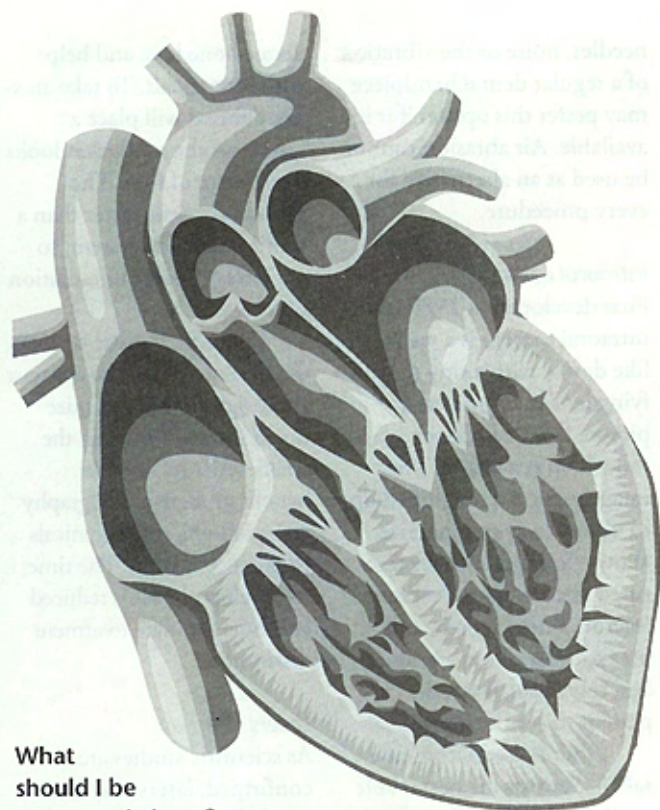


## Oral health and your heart



### What should I be concerned about?

Researchers are finding possible links between periodontal infections and other diseases throughout the body. Current studies suggest that there may be a link between periodontal (gum) disease, heart disease and other health conditions. In fact, research suggests that gum disease may be a more serious risk factor for heart disease than hypertension, smoking, cholesterol, gender and age.

New studies suggest that people who have gum disease seem to be at a higher risk for heart attacks, although no

one is certain how this relationship works. Your oral health affects your overall health, but the studies that will find exactly why these problems are linked are still underway.

### How can gum disease affect my overall health?

The current theory is that bacteria present in infected gums can come loose and move throughout the body. The same bacteria that cause gum disease and irritate your gums might travel to your arteries. Researchers are

unsure what causes the bacteria to become mobile, but it has been suggested that bacteria can be dislodged and enter the bloodstream during tasks as simple as brushing, flossing or even chewing.

Research shows that risk varies according to the level of gum infection. The worse the infection, the more likely the bacteria are to become blood-borne. Infected gums bleed, making it easier for bacteria to enter your bloodstream. If bacteria become dislodged, the bacteria enter through cuts or sores in your mouth and travel to other parts of the body through your bloodstream.

Once bacteria reaches the arteries, they can irritate them in the same way that they irritate gum tissue. This could cause arterial plaque to accumulate in the arteries, which can cause hardening and block blood-flow.

Compromised blood-flow to your heart can cause a heart attack. Also, arterial plaque can come loose and travel to other parts of the body. If blockage occurs in the brain, it can cause a stroke.

Your dentist may use a special rinse immediately after dental procedures to neutralize these bacteria, but your best protection is to maintain a healthy mouth.

### What should I do?

Keep your mouth healthy! See your dentist at least twice a year for periodic maintenance. Gum disease is a serious gum infection that should always be taken seriously. Although gum disease can often show few or no symptoms at all, watch for gums that are red and irritated, or gums that bleed easily. There are many new treatments available to control and help reverse gum disease.

Always remember that gum disease is caused by plaque buildup. Brush and floss regularly to remove plaque that you can't see below the gumline and remember to schedule regular check-ups. If you remove the plaque, you minimize the chance for getting gum disease.

If you have any questions about your oral health, ask your dentist.

### Sources:

*The American Heart Association:*  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
*JADA (Journal of the American Dental Association)*  
*American Dental Hygienists' Association:* [www.adha.org](http://www.adha.org)  
*CDA Journal v. 28, No. 3, March 2000 National Institute of Dental & Craniofacial Research:*  
[www.nidcr.nih.gov](http://www.nidcr.nih.gov)

This information was compiled for you by the Academy of General Dentistry. Your dentist cares about long-term dental health for you and your family and demonstrates that concern by belonging to the Academy of General Dentistry. As one of the 35,000 general dentists in the United States and Canada who are members of the Academy, your dentist participates in an ongoing program of professional development and continuing education to remain current with advances in the profession and to provide quality patient treatment. Visit the AGD's website at [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org). You have permission to photocopy this page and distribute it to your patients.