

# Your Oral Health and Chronic Disease



## What does my mouth have to do with chronic disease?

Your oral health (teeth, gums, and tongue) is connected to your overall health. This is because all of your body's systems work together. If your mouth is not healthy, that can make other parts of your body sick. It can even lead to chronic diseases like diabetes or high cholesterol.



### Bad oral health can cause problems in your mouth:

- » Tooth decay (cavities)
- » Gum disease
- » Regular bad breath



### Bad oral health can cause big problems in the rest of your body:

- » **Diabetes:** Poor oral hygiene can lower your body's ability to control your blood sugar. Good oral hygiene can help your body control blood sugar.
- » **Heart disease:**
  - Untreated cavities and gum disease can lead to heart disease.
  - Bacteria from your mouth can cause an infection in the inner lining of your heart.
  - People with gum disease are nearly 2 times as likely to get heart disease.
- » **High cholesterol** The swelling from gum disease can raise your cholesterol level.
- » **Low birth weight babies** Bacteria from your mouth can get into your blood stream and travel to your placenta and uterus. This may lead to your baby being born early.
- » **Lung infections** You can breathe bacteria from your mouth into your lungs. This can cause infections and pneumonia.
- » **Stroke:** If you have gum disease, you are at higher risk for stroke.
- » **Weak bones:** Gum disease can lower the thickness of your bones, making them weak and easier to break.

Your dentist can help you practice good oral health by watching for signs of tooth or gum problems, professionally cleaning your teeth, and reminding you how to take care of your mouth at home.



## How can my dentist help me with other health problems?

Just by looking at your mouth, your dentist can tell if you are at risk for chronic diseases, like:

- » **Low red blood cells** make your tongue burn and turn red. It can also make the corners of your mouth swell and your gums turn pale.
- » **Eating disorders** cause poor nutrition, and poor nutrition causes a number of problems in your mouth, like:
  - Bleeding gums
  - Changes in the color, shape, and length of your teeth
  - Brittle (easy to break) teeth
  - Tooth decay
- » **Diabetes** can cause many mouth problems:
  - Dry mouth
  - Bad breath
  - Burning tongue
  - Swollen gums or jaws
  - Infections in your mouth
  - Quick tooth decay
- » **Heart disease** can cause pain in your jaw. If your jaw pain is not caused by a cavity or infection, it could be a sign of heart disease.
- » **Kidney failure** can cause:
  - Dry mouth
  - Bad breath
  - A metallic taste
  - Ulcers on your tongue and gums
  - Teeth that do not grow the right way in children

You can manage many chronic diseases if they are found early. Regular dental check-ups give your dentist the chance to see signs of chronic disease you might not see on your own.



## How can I help protect myself against chronic disease?

- » Practice good oral health at home:
  - Brush 2 times a day for 2 minutes each time.
  - Floss (clean between your teeth) 1 time a day.
  - Eat tooth-friendly foods (milk, crunchy veggies, leafy green veggies).
  - Avoid food and drinks that have a lot of sugar (granola bars, sodas, sports drinks).
- » See a dentist 2 times a year (every 6 months). Your dentist will:
  - Help prevent and treat any problems in your mouth.
  - Look for signs of other health problems and tell you how to take care of them.



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