

# oral health: the mouth-body connection

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## Teeth and gums reveal the inside story of your overall health

Your teeth and gums speak volumes about your well-being. Cavities and gum disease may point to diabetes or heart disease, and loose teeth could be a sign of osteoporosis. Your oral health is connected to many other health conditions beyond your mouth. Sometimes the first sign of a disease shows up in your mouth. In other cases, infections in your mouth can cause problems in other areas of your body.

Diabetes is the one disease that we know can have a direct impact on infections in the bones and gums around the teeth. Diabetes and the mouth have blood sugar in common. If blood sugar levels are out of control in the body because you don't know you have diabetes, they're out of control in your mouth. With sugar to feed on, bacteria find a happy home in which to grow and thrive. The bacteria then attack the protective enamel layer on your teeth, and over time as the enamel breaks down, cavities develop -- one of the dental signs of diabetes.

## Oral Health & Heart Disease

Research shows that several types of cardiovascular disease may be linked to oral health. These include heart disease, clogged arteries, stroke and bacterial endocarditis. Researchers believe that bacteria from gum disease can enter your bloodstream and travel through your arteries to your heart, affecting your cardiovascular system.

There is strong evidence that poor oral health is a risk factor for potentially life-threatening systemic health problems. Either the bacteria from gum infections or the body's response to the bacteria which occurs in the bloodstream can increase the development of the fatty plaques that cause heart attacks and strokes. People with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease as those without periodontal disease.

A visit to your dentist can draw an important connection between oral health and overall health. ■