

# THE LINK BETWEEN ORAL HEALTH AND OVERALL HEALTH

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Did you know that gum disease affects approximately 75% of the adult population? Research studies show a strong link between gum disease and other diseases of the body. Poor oral health can cause more than just tooth loss, pain and foul odours, it can also contribute to other diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lung disease and even cause a pre-term, low birth weight baby.



Gums infected with periodontal disease (gum disease) are toxic reservoirs of disease causing bacteria. The toxins produced by the bacteria attack the gums, ligaments, and bone surrounding the teeth to produce infected pockets that provide access to your bloodstream allowing bacteria to travel throughout your body. Unfortunately, most people do not even realize they are affected by gum disease. This means that many of us are unknowingly at risk for triggering or complicating other diseases and conditions!

## **Gum disease and Cardiovascular health**

Heart disease is responsible for one-third of all deaths in Canada and costs the economy approximately \$18 billion dollars every year. Did you know gum disease could be yet another risk factor for heart disease? According to research, the reason for this increased risk may be the result of bloodstream contamination from the bacteria that exists in our mouths.

## **Gum disease and Diabetes**

Gum disease and diabetes are linked as a two way street. If you have uncontrolled diabetes, you are at increased risk of gum disease. Even more unsettling is that if you have diabetes and gum disease, controlling your blood-sugar levels becomes increasingly difficult, leading to complications.

## **Gum disease and Lung disease**

Inhaling oral bacteria into the lungs is now believed to cause respiratory infections and make existing lung conditions worse. In addition, the inflammation in your mouth triggers the release of chemicals that can worsen lung inflammation.

## **Gum disease and Pregnancy**

When gum disease is present, you are 7 times more likely to have a pre-term, low birth weight baby! Your body reacts to the infections in your gums by producing prostaglandins, a natural fatty acid that's involved with inflammation control and smooth muscle contraction. During your pregnancy the level of prostaglandins gradually increases, peaking when you go into labour. One theory is that, if extra prostaglandins are produced as a reaction to the bacterial infection in your gums, your body may interpret it as a signal to go into labour and your baby can be born too early or too small. Good oral health can help prevent many diseases from occurring or becoming worse. Visit your dental professional regularly in order to maintain good oral health, and achieve better overall health. A healthier mouth means a healthier you!

*Kristine Spehar and Jayme Bernard are Registered Dental Hygienists and part owners of First Impressions Dental Hygiene Clinic. Their services are approximately 20-30% less than a traditional dental office. They also accept dental insurance. You can visit them at 9 Court Street in St. Catharines and they can be reached at 289-362-4867. To learn more go to [www.firstimpressionsDHC.ca](http://www.firstimpressionsDHC.ca)*