

Regular Flossing Saves Time and Money in the Dentist's Chair

By Bill Wolfe, DDS



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Are you resistant to flossing every day? Have a hard time fitting it in or remembering to do it? Do you dislike the task just enough to avoid it until something is stuck and so bothersome that you can't stand it anymore? If you knew you could avoid some potentially serious health issues and save time and money with your dentist, would you be willing to invest less than 3 minutes per day?

Flossing reduces the risk of gingivitis (swollen gum tissue) and periodontal disease (damage to the bone and connective tissue supporting the teeth) by removing the bacteria that settle in-between the teeth. The normal human mouth harbors 400 species of bacteria, causing gingivitis and localized bleeding, which can eventually lead to periodontitis. Researchers recently determined that periodontal disease can escalate health problems in distant areas of the body.

About 14% of all American adults have advanced periodontal disease, putting them at risk of losing their teeth, and most adults aged 60 who have lost teeth may attribute this tooth loss to periodontal disease. While periodontal disease is thought of as an older person's affliction, as many as one-half of high school students have some form of gingivitis!

Medical Conditions Linked to Periodontal Disease

Heart Attack & Stroke: Patients with periodontal disease are twice as likely to suffer a fatal heart attack and nearly three times as likely to suffer a stroke as those without periodontal disease. This association with heart disease is especially evident in patients under 50.

Bacterial Infection & Diabetes: It has been well established that diabetes predisposes patients to bacterial infections, including those affecting the oral cavity. Recent studies provide strong indications that periodontal disease can make diabetes worse, as diabetics with severe periodontal disease have greater difficulty maintaining normal blood-sugar levels. Dental researchers now recommend that periodontal inflammation be treated and eliminated in all diabetic patients in order to significantly reduce the risk of injury to the retina and arteries. Such treatment also often leads to a reduced need for insulin.

Pneumonia & Other Respiratory Diseases: Pneumonia occurs when bacteria dwelling in the oral cavity and throat are inhaled into the lungs where immune system defenses fail to fight them. Some bacteria that cause pneumonia thrive in infected oral tissues of patients with periodontal disease.

Premature Birth: There is increasing evidence that infections in the mouth have a direct link to inducing premature labor. In one study researchers found that mothers of prematurely born babies were seven times more likely to have advanced periodontal disease as mothers whose babies were born at normal weight.

Other Infections: Patients with artificial heart valves and joints are at increased risk of suffering a serious infection when periodontal bacteria enter the bloodstream. In patients with artificial heart valves, the infection can be fatal unless promptly and aggressively treated with antibiotics.

*The National Association of Dental Assistants, 900 South Washington Street, Falls Church, VA 22046, 703-237-8616.

If you have a concern that any health issue might be linked to periodontal disease and want to know more, contact Dr. Wolfe today!

Dr. Wolfe graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1968 & received his dental degree from Baylor College of Dentistry in 1972. He practices in ABQ & Santa Fe, NM, focusing on "Biological Dentistry", which includes the principles of electro-acupuncture, kinesiology & homeopathy. Dr. Wolfe is also a board certified naturopathic physician & an international speaker. His speaking engagements include: The British Homeopathic Dental Assoc.; The International College of Applied Kinesiology; & the International Assoc. of Oral Medicine and Toxicology, Royal Society of Medicine & more.

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