In your mouth, teeth and gums are an agent in maintaining a healthy body. Alternative medical professionals have long understood that an unhealthy mouth will wreak havoc on the rest of the body.

Conventional Research
The link between poor health of gums (aka: periodontal disease), and major systemic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease, low birth weight infants, and behavioral and psychosocial conditions, is finally being recognized by the conventional medical community. Over the last ten years, the evidence is mounting and eventually the ongoing research studies will be made conclusive. So far:

• Patients with periodontal disease have a 1.5-2.0 times greater risk of incurring a fatal cardiovascular disease, according to The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP). “Importantly, dental infections appear to increase the risk of coronary artery disease to a degree similar to the classical risk factors for cardiovascular disease including age, smoking, diabetes, hypertension and elevated serum triglycerides.”

• “...periodontal disease is often considered the sixth complication of diabetes,” claims the AAP. One reason diabetics are more apt to have periodontal disease, than those without diabetes, is that diabetics are more susceptible to contracting infections in general.

• The sixth leading cause of mortality in the United States is chronic bronchitis or emphysema. Sixteen million Americans suffer from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). F. Scannapieco, DMD, lead researcher of a study published in the January 2001 Journal of Periodontology, found that patients with periodontal disease have a 1.5 times greater risk of COPD.

• Dr. Steven Offenbacher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1996 found that even after taking other possible causes of prematurity into account, women with periodontal disease are 7 times more likely to have a baby of low birth weight or that is premature.

200-300 Species of Bacteria in Your Mouth
One fact, often overlooked in understanding all the risks, is that periodontal disease is infectious or communicable and can be passed between family members.

Bacteria are the reasons that periodontal disease is such a risk factor to these major systemic diseases. There are from 200-300 different species of bacteria in the mouth. Unlike any other place in or on the human body, the mouth breeds this vast diversity of both good and bad bacteria. Good bacteria that our bodies benefit from are usually aerobic – live off of and reproduce in air. The bacteria which produces periodontal disease and are mostly pathological are anaerobic – that is, live in the absence of air.

The environment that exists between teeth and around the gums is warm, dark, acidic and carbohydrate-rich. This environment is exactly what anaerobic bacteria need. They not only survive, but reproduce at alarming rates in this environment. The excrement from the anaerobic bacteria forms a sticky water-resistant shield around the tooth, similar to a gasket. It is extremely difficult to penetrate this greasy film, which is called plaque.

Healthy teeth and gums have four obstacles to deal with:
1. the sticky, greasy, water-resistant plaque
2. the airless spaces between teeth and around the gum line
3. the acidic environment produced by starches and sugars
4. the incredible rate of reproduction of the bacteria

Dental Problems Caused by Bacteria
The anaerobic bacteria, which live in the mouth cause dental decay, periodontal disease, and gingivitis.

• Dental decay is actually caused by the acidic excrement from the bacteria. The tooth is literally being dissolved by chronically being bathed in this acid.

• Gingivitis is the inflammation of the gums caused by your own body trying to fight off the invasion of the bacteria.

• Periodontal disease (perio = around, and dental = tooth) is the loss of bone and tissue attachment around the tooth. It is caused by a microbial invasion around the tooth by anaerobic bacteria.

Bad breath that won’t go away, red or swollen gums, tender or bleeding gums, painful chewing, loose teeth, and sensitive teeth are all signs of periodontal disease. However, it is important to know that you can have periodontal disease and not exhibit any
of the signs. A dental professional can determine if you have the disease.

Taking Steps To Reduce Your Risk
Steps to prevent dental problems and decrease the risk factors for the major systemic diseases are:
1. Break through the sticky plaque shield with an abrasive
2. Aerate between teeth
3. Neutralize the acid in the mouth
4. Reduce the anaerobic bacteria population (plaque) in the mouth
You can do this by getting professional cleaning at a dentist’s office every six months and brushing teeth twice a day and flossing once a day. Because it is a laborious task to floss, most people don’t. And oral irrigators can’t cut through plaque’s sticky biofilm. If you have crowns, bridges, implants and orthodontic appliances you have the additional cracks and crevices for bacteria to accumulate and where a toothbrush has trouble accessing.

Today, there are numerous devices to keep your mouth clean: electric toothbrushes, oral irrigators, tongue scrapers, oral disinfectants and a device that combines brushing, flossing and aerates the sites between teeth. Even with more tools available to keep teeth and gums healthier than in the past, 80% of all adults have some form of periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is directly related to the thoroughness and frequency of removing the bacteria-causing plaque and indirectly related to the risk factors for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease, low birth weight infants, and behavioral and psychosocial conditions. So whatever method of teeth cleaning you use, be thorough and diligent. Oral health is critical to total health.

Author
P. Piero DDS is a practicing dentist in Holland, Michigan and inventor of Dental Air Force - a dental cleaning system for the home that combines tooth brushing and flossing and aerates the sites between teeth by using air, water and a dental cleaner. He can be reached at 616-399-8511, info@dentalairforce.com or visit www.dentalairforce.com

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