

Your Immune System May be Shaped by Your Mouth

Flora Stay, D.D.S.

We are facing a health crisis in America. Chronic illness, allergies, cancer and even vague illnesses are on the rise with fingers pointed at many causes. However, closer to home, we do know our immune system plays a major role in how our body functions to promote health or succumb to disease. Knowing this fact should guide us to find what helps versus what might weaken our immune system. Many books and articles have been written that offer answers. Stress, poor diet, pollution are just some of the things that volumes have been written about. One very important source is rarely considered.

The mouth provides a unique opportunity, almost like a window, to how well our immune support system is functioning. This connection is rarely discussed and might at first seem an odd connection, but it becomes obvious when you know the science behind how it all works. For example, have you ever experienced a little bleeding when brushing or flossing your teeth? If you do, the bleeding is a warning sign that your immune system is on the attack mode in the mouth. Even slight

bleeding is a sign of gum disease. If not treated, gum disease is nothing more than chronic inflammation. Chronic inflammation is a breakdown of tissue which puts a burden on the immune system as it fights to promote health. If the tissue breakdown continues and advances, your body's immune system becomes more challenged and unable to fight other illnesses.

Gum disease is just one example of how the mouth may affect your immune system, and that's what I'm addressing in this article. Unfortunately, gum disease, known as "gingivitis" in the beginning stage and "periodontitis" in the more advanced, rarely causes pain. The unsuspecting person may not be aware that there is tissue breakdown, until it's too late and the teeth are loose.

Several studies, including one in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 2004 have reported that chronic inflammation, no matter where the source, is the cause of many illnesses. A test known as "CRP" or "C-Reactive Protein" is now available to determine if inflammation exists somewhere in

the body. This is important because if the test shows a high CRP level, you're more at risk for heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease, pregnancy problems and other illnesses.

Statistics referenced on the American Dental Association web site (www.ada.org) show more than 75 percent of American adults suffer with some form of gum disease. The good news is that if you seek regular dental care, and practice good home oral hygiene, gum disease is reversible and the inflammation can be cleared up. As it advances, the damage is already done, and usually teeth have to be pulled with your immune system having paid the price.

There really is no excuse not to get regular dental checkups or not to practice good home oral hygiene. Now that you know, find your soul-mate dentist and have your mouth checked.

Flora Stay has been in private practice for over 30 years, was an Associate Professor at USC School of Dentistry and is the author of The Secret Gateway to Health.

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