

Health Trends

Identifying The Link Between Oral And Overall Health


(NAPSA)—A smile may reveal more than your mood. It can reflect on your health too. Oral problems, such as a painful jaw or bleeding gums, can sometimes be early indications of larger health problems—a dental fact doctors say Americans should pay more than lip service to.

Yet a national survey by the Academy of General Dentistry found 63 percent of baby boomers with oral symptoms considered to be an early warning sign of a disease were unaware of the symptom's link to the disease. For example:

- **Diabetes**—The National Diabetes Association reports 90 to 95 percent of diabetes sufferers have Type 2 diabetes, the onset of which usually occurs after age 45. Bad breath and bleeding gums are often indicators of diabetes. However, only 29 percent of those surveyed were aware of the relationship.

- **Osteoporosis**—It's estimated that 44 million Americans are at risk of osteoporosis, particularly menopausal and post-menopausal women. Dental x-rays may show the first signs of bone loss.

- **Heart Health**—The American Heart Association reports heart disease is the number one killer of Americans. When people reach the age of 45, their risk of developing heart disease triples. A sore, painful jaw should send a warning signal to older people that a heart attack could be looming, yet 60 percent of those surveyed did not identify a painful jaw as an early warning symptom.

Links Between Oral Health and Overall Health	
Disease	Oral Symptom
Diabetes	Bad breath and bleeding gums are sometimes indicators of diabetes. Dry mouth (xerostomia) also may develop, causing increased tooth decay. Receding gums has been found to occur more frequently in moderate- and poorly-controlled diabetic patients because plaque responds differently in diabetics.
Heart Disease	Gum disease may exacerbate a pre-existing heart condition. A sore or painful jaw could indicate an impending heart attack or heart disease.
Osteoporosis	Receding gums and bone loss around teeth are key indicators of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis increases the risk factors for tooth loss and periodontal disease. 

Oral health problems can be early warning signs of more serious health conditions.

The survey found that while people may lack knowledge about the meaning of certain symptoms, they do not lack experience with the symptoms themselves. A quarter of baby boomers reported they had an oral symptom for a particular disease.

“As research strengthens the link between oral and overall health, the Academy of General Dentistry encourages baby boomers to pay attention to oral symptoms that may indicate early signs of potentially life-threatening diseases,” says Craig Valentine, DMD, FAGD, and member of the Academy's Public Information Council.

Unfortunately, the survey found most boomers do not dis-

cuss symptoms with their dentists, and many do not even visit dentists. Almost one third of boomers asked said they never visit the dentist or only visit the dentist in the case of an emergency. In addition, fewer than half visit the dentist twice a year, as recommended.

“As the baby boomer population continues to age, being armed with knowledge specific to their oral-healthcare needs is critical,” says Valentine.

To help people keep an eye on their oral and overall health, the Academy provides a toll free directory of general dentists. Consumers can call 1-877-2X-A-YEAR or visit www.agd.org to access the list or for more information.



Note to Editors: On Friday, July 5, 2002, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. EDT, consumers can call 1-800-SMILE-33 to have their oral-health questions answered immediately. The hotline is sponsored by the Academy with help from DENTSPLY International and Kodak Dental Products.