

YOUR DENTAL HEALTH

Experts: Millions Of 50-Plus Americans At Risk For Oral Disease And Related Maladies

(NAPSA)—Millions of 50-plus Americans fail to realize that their oral health is directly linked to their overall health, according to two of the top oral health care experts in the United States. A growing body of evidence from ongoing studies has shown a potential link between periodontal (gum) disease and other “systemic” maladies, such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and stroke.

“There are those who say a person’s eyes are a window into their soul, but a person’s mouth is a window into their state of overall health,” said Barbara J. Steinberg, DDS, a nationally and internationally invited lecturer in the areas of dental treatment of medically compromised patients.

Although more studies are needed, researchers suspect that the oral microbial infections and inflammation associated with periodontal disease play a role in systemic problems—meaning they can affect the body as a whole, according to Harold C. Slavkin, DDS, one of the chief architects of the landmark Surgeon General’s Report on Oral Health, released in 2000.

Dr. Slavkin, dean of the University of Southern California School of Dentistry, said it is possible that periodontal disease might contribute to, or worsen, several maladies including:

- Diabetes
- Stroke
- Heart disease
- Microbial Pulmonary Diseases and Disorders
- Respiratory diseases



Dr. Barbara Steinberg says, “A person’s mouth is a window into their state of overall health.”

• Dry and Burning Mouth

“It is essential that older Americans monitor their oral health, paying particular attention to their gums,” said Dr. Slavkin. “Gum disease is a serious infection that can release bacteria into the bloodstream, and because there are often no symptoms of gum disease in its early stages, consistent oral evaluation is an extremely important component in the monitoring of a person’s health. This becomes more and more important as we age.”

Additionally, regular dental visits might provide early prognosis of oral cancer, a particularly virulent form of the disease that kills more than 9,000 people per year. “About 50 percent of those diagnosed with it die within five years,” Dr. Slavkin said. Clearly, the health implications for post-retirement

dental care are significant.

Recent studies by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) show that 72 percent of the population older than 50 have periodontal disease, the leading cause of tooth loss.

Only about 60 percent of those 50 and older have dental insurance, and most face losing this coverage when they retire. According to U.S. Census statistics, the 50-plus population was about 27 percent in 2000; by 2020, that number will jump by more than 115 million to approximately 35 percent.

“Medicare does not cover routine dental services and, in most states, neither does Medicaid,” Dr. Slavkin said. “With continued dental care, those who are 50-plus can avoid a myriad of health problems, including tooth loss, gum disease and mouth cancers. With continued care, we can all enjoy a robust lifestyle and a wide range of foods, communicate effectively, maintain self-esteem and meet our social responsibilities within our family and community.”

There are affordable options for Dental Coverage: the AARP Dental Insurance Plan from Delta Dental offers dental insurance for AARP members. The AARP Dental Insurance Plan provides immediate coverage for most preventive, diagnostic and basic restorative services, as well as endodontics (root canal treatment) and oral surgery (extractions). After 12 months, coverage expands to include major restorations, periodontics (gum treatment) and prosthodontics (dentures).