



THE EFFECTS OF ORAL HEALTH ON OVERALL HEALTH

The Issue

Oral health is not only important to your appearance and sense of well-being, but also to your overall health. Cavities and gum disease may contribute to many serious conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases, and premature and low weight babies. Untreated cavities can also be painful and lead to serious infections.

Background

Maintaining good oral health includes keeping teeth free from cavities and preventing gum disease. Poor oral health can affect your appearance and self-esteem, and has been linked to sleeping problems, as well as behavioural and developmental problems in children. Poor oral health can also affect your ability to chew and digest food properly.

Good nutrition is important to helping build strong teeth and gums that can resist disease and promote healing.

Smoking is a major risk factor for oral and dental disease, including oral cancer. Tobacco reduces blood flow to the gums; therefore, the gums do not get the oxygen and nutrients needed to stay healthy and prevent bacterial infection.

Oral health needs to be a priority throughout all stages of life, especially since older adults and seniors are keeping their teeth longer than ever before. However, older adults may have less access to oral care services and dentists because of lower incomes and/or a lack of dental insurance.

Seniors living in long-term care facilities are at particular risk of complications from poor oral health because of frailty, poor health and increased dependence on others for personal care. In many cases, oral health problems in residents go undetected until there are acute symptoms, such as pain or infection.

Besides pain and discomfort, poor oral health can also contribute to a number of serious health issues.

Health Risks Of Poor Oral Health

Gum disease is an inflammation of the gums, which may also affect the bone supporting the teeth. Plaque is a sticky colourless film of bacteria that constantly builds up, thickens and hardens on the teeth. If it is not removed by daily brushing and flossing, this plaque can harden into tartar and contribute to infections in the gums.

Left untreated, gum disease can lead to the loss of teeth and an increased risk of more serious diseases, including heart disease and stroke. The bacteria in plaque can travel from the mouth into the bloodstream, and has been linked to the clogging of arteries and damage to heart valves. The same bacteria can also travel to the lungs, causing infection or aggravating existing lung conditions.

There is also a link between diabetes and gum disease. People with diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease,



and it can put them at greater risk of diabetic complications.

Oral health is also extremely important for pregnant women. Studies show that pregnant women with gum disease are at higher risk of delivering pre-term, low birth weight babies than women without gum disease. This is a concern because such babies are already at increased risk of many ailments, including developmental complications, asthma, ear infections, congenital abnormalities and behavioural difficulties, such as attention deficit disorder. They also have a higher risk of infant death.

Minimizing Your Risk

To maintain good oral health, you should take the following steps:

- Brush and floss your teeth daily.
- Visit your dental professional regularly to have your mouth examined. See your dental professional immediately if you notice any problems.
- Eat a healthy diet according to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.
- Do not smoke. If you do smoke, make sure to visit your dental professional regularly.
- If you are pregnant, be sure to eat healthy foods and maintain good oral health.
- Brush your children's teeth for them, until they have the dexterity to write their own name

(not print). They should then be able to brush their own teeth with your guidance.

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada is committed to helping all Canadians maintain their health. The Dental Division of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada (FNIHB) works to maintain and improve the oral health of First Nations and Inuit. The division delivers and manages a broad range of oral health activities including proactive disease prevention, oral health promotion and basic dental treatment services provided by regional dental therapists, contract dentists and other FNIHB staff.

Health Canada's Division of Aging and Seniors provides federal leadership and serves as a focal point for information in areas pertaining to aging and seniors. The Division undertakes a broad range of policy, program and education activities related to seniors health and well-being.

Need More Info?

Canadian Dental Association - Your Oral Health at:
http://www.cda-adc.ca/english/your_oral_health/default.asp

For information for kids visit the Nova Scotia Dental Association's Web site at:
<http://www.healthyteeth.org/>

Canadian Dental Hygienists at:
http://www.cdha.ca/content/oralcare_centre/oralcare_centre.asp

For more information on Fluorides visit the It's Your Health article at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/environment/fluorides.html>

For information on Healthy Eating see Health Canada's Food Guide at:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food_guide_rainbow_e.html

National Institute of Nutrition - Dental Health
http://www.nin.ca/public_html/Consumer/dental_health.html

For Information on Diabetes and Dental Health see the Publication - "Dental Care - Truth or Dare" at:
http://www.diabetes.ca/Section_About/dental.asp

For more information on First Nations and Inuit Health, Primary Health Care and Public Health got to:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihb-dgspni/fnihb/phcph/aboutphcph.htm

For more information on Seniors Health go to Health Canada's Division of Aging and Seniors at:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/index_pages/whatsnew_e.htm

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:
www.healthcanada.ca/iyh
You can also call (613) 957-2991

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