

# Brush up to prevent heart disease

Take good care of your teeth, and you may also be taking good care of your heart. A number of recent studies have revealed a link between periodontal (gum) disease and heart disease.

Gum disease can occur without any evident warning signs and is often painless, but several indicators can signal the disease. Talk to your dentist if you notice any of these indicators:

- Gums that bleed easily
- Red, swollen, tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste in the mouth
- Permanent teeth that are loose or separating
- Any change in the way the teeth fit together when biting
- Any change in the fit of partial dentures



Research shows a correlation between gum disease and an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, researchers found that gum disease plays a role in blood vessel dysfunction, a condition that improves with intensive periodontal treatment (which may include scaling and root planing, locally administered antibiotics and tooth extraction), according to a study reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.<sup>2</sup>

These studies, along with other research, confirms that dental benefits continue to play an important part in maintaining overall health. Regular brushing, flossing, and dental checkups are more important than ever for your heart and general wellness. And since heart disease is the leading cause of death for Americans, brush up for your heart health!

Sources: American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/gum-disease-symptoms.htm>, accessed March 2010.

1 Beck JD, Garcia R, Heiss G, Vokonas PS, Offenbacher S: Periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease. *J. Periodontology* 67,1123-1137 (1996).

2 *New England Journal of Medicine*, <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/short/356/9/911>.