

# Heart Disease, Stroke & Oral Health

## Your Mouth, The Gateway to Your Body



The health of your mouth may affect your overall health. Poor oral health may influence your body's response to heart disease and stroke. Healthy gums help protect your body from the bacteria (germs) on your teeth and in your mouth that can cause an infection.

**Gum (Periodontal) Disease** If germs stay on your teeth for too long, layers of plaque and tartar (hardened plaque) develop. This buildup leads to early gum disease, called gingivitis. Red, swollen, tender or bleeding gums are signs of an early gum infection. Unless the infection is treated the inflammation continues. As gum disease progresses, the bacteria invade surrounding bone and supporting structures that hold teeth in place. Painful chewing, loose or sensitive teeth, or gums that pull away from teeth are signs of severe gum disease, also called periodontitis. Your entire body reacts to the infection and inflammation in your mouth.

### **Inflammation causes problems in other parts of the body.**

Inflammation is the body's natural response to an infection. Experts think that as inflamed blood vessels swell less blood may flow to the heart and the rest of the body, raising blood pressure.

Bacteria may enter the bloodstream through the gums and become part of fatty plaques (a buildup of fat, cholesterol, calcium and other substances) in blood vessels.

- ♥ A stroke occurs when fatty plaques break off the wall of a blood vessel and travel to the brain cutting off its blood supply.
- ♥ A heart attack occurs when fatty plaques block a blood vessel leading to the heart.



### **Eliminate smoking and improve your overall health.**

Smoking is related to gum disease, heart disease and stroke. Smoking weakens your body's immune system. This makes it harder to fight off a gum infection. Once you have gum damage, smoking also makes it harder for your gums to heal.

Nicotine in tobacco causes blood vessels to constrict. As vessels narrow, blood pressure rises. Undetected or uncontrolled high blood pressure leads to heart disease, stroke, kidney failure and premature death. Quitting smoking and maintaining a healthy blood pressure through diet, exercise and nutrition may reduce the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

Additional research needs to be conducted on the relationship between oral health and heart disease and stroke. However, it is important to note that people with good oral health generally have fewer chronic diseases, including heart disease and stroke.

#### **References**

WebMD , accessed June 2, 2014. <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/features/oral-health-the-mouth-body-connection>.

National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research., <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/HeartDisease/>, accessed June 2, 2014.

"Heart Disease and Oral Health: Role of oral bacteria in heart plaque," [http://www.health.harvard.edu/press\\_releases/heart-disease-oral-health](http://www.health.harvard.edu/press_releases/heart-disease-oral-health), February 2007, accessed June 2, 2014.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Smoking, Gum Disease and Tooth Disease", "<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/periodontal-gum-disease.html>, accessed 8/21/2014.

# Heart Attack Warning Signs



**Chest discomfort** - Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.

**Discomfort in other areas of the upper body** - Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.

**Shortness of breath** with or without chest discomfort.

**Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

## Warning Signs in Women

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

If you or someone close to you show signs of a heart attack, call 9-1-1 right away. **Minutes Matter!**

### References:

American Heart Association, [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org), accessed 08/13/2014.

American Stroke Association, [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org), accessed 08/13/2014.



**F** **ace Drooping** Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile. Is the person's smile uneven?

**A** **rm Weakness** Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**S** **peech Difficulty** Is speech slurred? Is the person unable to speak or hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, like "The sky is blue." Is the sentence repeated correctly?

**T** **ime to call 9-1-1** If someone shows these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and get the person to the hospital immediately. Check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared.

## Keep Your Heart and Mouth Healthy

- ♥ See your dentist regularly and tell your dentist about your heart condition.
- ♥ If you take blood thinning medications speak with your dentist and physician before your appointment. Provide your dentist with a list of any medications that you take.
- ♥ Good oral hygiene habits may help prevent some types of heart infections. Brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day and floss at least once a day. Maintain a healthy diet that is low in sugar.
- ♥ You may need to take special precautions if you have any of the following conditions: prosthetic heart valve, history of endocarditis, or a heart defect (such as a damaged valve). If needed and prescribed by your dentist or physician, take an antibiotic before your dental appointment.

Office of Oral Health  
Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
201 W. Preston Street, 4th Floor  
Baltimore MD 21201

410-767-5300

<http://phpa.dhmf.maryland.gov/oralhealth>

e-mail: [dhmf.oralhealth@maryland.gov](mailto:dhmf.oralhealth@maryland.gov)



Office of  
Oral Health

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene



Larry Hogan, Governor | Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor | Dennis Schrader, Secretary

Revised 01/17