

Gum Disease: A Silent Epidemic that Affects 80% of the American Population

By Dr. Kerry M. Goad, DDS

The U.S. Surgeon General office estimates that gum disease affects 80% of the American population. If you have recurring bleeding gums when brushing and flossing, red and puffy gums, chronic bad breath or loose teeth, it's probably time to visit your dentist because these are only a few of the symptoms of gum disease.

The disease is a chronic inflammation and infection of the gums and underlying bone caused by bacterial plaque. This plaque is a sticky colorless film that constantly forms on the teeth. If it's not removed by daily brushing and flossing, it hardens into a rough porous substance called calculus or tarter.

The bacteria present in plaque produce and release toxins (poisons), which irritate the gums. The toxins cause a breakdown of the fibers that hold the gums tightly to the roots of the teeth creating a periodontal pocket. If left untreated, the pockets fill with even more bacteria and toxins. As the disease progresses the pockets extend deeper and the bacteria eventually destroy the bone that holds the teeth in place. Eventually your teeth will fall out or need to be extracted. You will then need false teeth or costly implants.

The health of your gums affects the health of your entire body. Diseases of the mouth affect the



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entire body. Periodontal bacteria can enter the blood stream and travel to major organs and begin new infections. A protein called C-reactive protein is produced when inflammation such as gum disease occurs. C-reactive protein is related to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis and respiratory disease.

Even more startling is the newest information from West Virginia University that found a "clean mouth-free of infection" might also prevent memory loss. This could have great implications for the health of our aging populations.

At Richardson Cosmetic Dentistry, we treat moderate to advanced gum disease using one of the

most important advances in dentistry called LANAP (Laser Assisted New Attachment Procedure). Approximately 1,000 dentists in the U.S. are certified to deliver this FDA cleared laser treatment using the Periolas technique. It treats moderate to advanced gum disease that previously required surgery. LANAP doesn't require any cutting of the gums nor stitches. It is less painful and less invasive than the traditional cut and suture periodontal surgery.

If you have a family history of gum disease you have a greater chance of having it. So please be vigilant in maintaining good oral care—it may save your health!