

August 22, 2009



## For a dentist, the mouth holds clues to many ill

In the July 6, 2009 Washington Post, staff writer, Michael Birnbaum states in part:

Your mouth can tell you a lot about your overall health.

Following are some non-oral-health issues and the possible clues from Washington dentist Dr. Joseph Kravitz:

**Heart disease.** Gums that have turned a "bright beefy red" or purple. Kravitz checks his patients' blood pressure when he notices those symptoms.

**Type 2 diabetes.** Gums that bleed at the slightest touch although there is no plaque evident. Kravitz said patients with diabetes also typically have sores elsewhere on their bodies that they may not have connected to the disease.

**Kidney disease.** A sweet ammonia smell on a person's breath, detectable even from behind a dentist's surgical mask.

**Acid reflux.** Teeth that look worn and pitted, as if they'd been "dipped in battery acid." Only some teeth will be affected, depending on where the acids settle during a person's typical sleeping position.

**Oral cancer.** Gum tissues with white spots that last two weeks or more. (Kravitz said spots that clear up more quickly can indicate many other things, including something as simple as having bitten into too-hot pizza.)

**Leukemia.** Fiery-red swollen gums that just won't heal, distinguishable from diabetes symptoms with a blood test.

**Osteoporosis.** Certain black spots on tooth X-rays that indicate air pockets and dead bone.

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**Sleep apnea.** An enlarged tongue and inflamed gums in the part of the mouth through which air passes.

**Pregnancy.** Deeply swollen gums can indicate hormonal changes.

**Bulimia.** Upper front teeth that are paper thin, with the enamel almost completely worn away, and teeth that hurt. Distinguishable from acid reflux because different teeth are affected.

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