



**October 3, 2009**

As Seen On the Dr. Oz Show...

## **The Mouth As A Marker For Disease**



The eye might be a window to your soul, but the mouth is the door to disease. While it might be hard to make the connection between tooth loss and a heart attack, what goes on in your mouth can foreshadow many diseases.

### **Pocket Watch**

One look inside the mouth will reveal that there are bacteria everywhere. For the most part we cohabit without a worry – but badly-behaving bacteria can collect in gum pockets to cause swelling, bleeding and bone loss that in turn can cause teeth to loosen and fall out.

People with gum disease (periodontal disease and gingivitis), may harbor up to 500 species of bacteria, and the proximity of that bacteria to the normally sterile bloodstream can be worrisome. Bacteria can enter small blood vessels, travel to other parts of the body and release toxins and trigger inflammatory chemicals that assault arteries and organs. Gum disease and tooth loss is now considered a harbinger for coronary artery disease, infective endocarditis, bacterial pneumonia, diabetes, kidney disease and stroke. Periodontal bacteria have also been detected in the mouths and amniotic fluid of women who have experienced threatening premature labor, miscarriage and may contribute to low-birth weight.

### **Breath Tests**

Breath can be telling too. More than 90% of the time bad breath (halitosis) emanates from bacteria living in gum pockets, under dentures and on the surface of the tongue. It is not only unpleasant to people close to you, but it may also be a clue to other medical conditions.

Oral cancers, lung cancer, certain leukemias and dry mouth syndromes such as Sjogren's syndrome can cause bacterial overgrowth that contribute to bad breath. And sometimes a systemic disease produces distinct chemical odors:

- Sweet or fruity odor may indicate uncontrolled diabetes
- Mousy ammonia odor may indicate liver disease
- Urine-like fishy odor may indicate chronic kidney failure
- And fecal odor may indicate intestinal blockage.

To find out if you have foul-smelling breath, ask a truthful friend, or lick your hand and smell the saliva.

### **Tongue Tip-off**

Changes in the tongue can also be a tip-off to disease. A pale, smooth, flattened and sometimes tender tongue can point to iron or vitamin B12 deficiency, a hallmark of the common blood disorder, iron-deficiency anemia. People with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis may notice tiny ulcers. If the tongue looks like a geographic map with areas of dark and light it may indicate an autoimmune disorder such as psoriasis or discoid lupus erythematosus. Recurrent episodes of white patches indicate thrush, an overgrowth of the yeast *Candida*, which may indicate diabetes. Strawberry red swollen tongue with a white coating and big red bumps is a symptom of Kawasaki disease.

### **Telling Teeth**

Hairline cracks in the teeth can indicate tooth-grinding, the sleep disorder bruxism or mental stress. People with bulimia have enamel loss on their front teeth from the assault of stomach acid from repeated vomiting.

### **Keep Oral Traditions**

Keeping up with a good program of oral hygiene and tending to dental and gum problems before they worsen is key to keeping mouths healthy. People with declining dexterity may need to make modifications that assure that good dental care continues. Electric toothbrushes, vibrating gum massagers and dental water jets can help. Routine dental visits are crucial, especially if you are planning to become pregnant or are facing a course of chemotherapy, which can reduce immunity against oral bacteria and cause mouth sores.

Here's some help for halitosis, guidance for gums and tips for tooth care.

- Investigate any changes in your oral health
- Brush in the morning, at night and after meals with a soft toothbrush or African chew stick
- Use a tongue scraper along the length of the tongue to remove odor-causing bacteria
- Use an antiseptic mouth rinse
- Floss between teeth and inside the crease where the gum and tooth meet
- Keep well hydrated and avoid mouth breathing
- Don't smoke or be near someone smoking (that can cause smoker's breath too!)
- Try chewing on neem leaves, green cardamom, cloves, parsley, guava peels and gum mastic for breath control
- Visit the dentist regularly

For Your Better Dental Health:

*Dr. Petrosky & Staff*

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