

Dental/Oral Health (Smile)



The Inflammation Gateway

Periodontal (gum) disease is a source of systemic inflammation. The same bacteria that cause gum disease have been found in atherosclerotic plaques and are associated with increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and premature birth. Inflammation is the common mechanism linking oral health to cardiovascular disease.



Diabetes — Bidirectional Relationship

Periodontal disease worsens glycemic control in people with diabetes — and elevated blood sugar worsens gum disease. This bidirectional relationship means untreated gum disease can make A1C harder to control. Treating periodontal disease has been shown to reduce A1C by approximately 0.36–0.5 percentage points.



Cardiovascular Risk Connection

People with periodontal disease have approximately 2–3x higher risk of heart attack and stroke compared to those without. CRP (C-reactive protein) — a blood marker of systemic inflammation — is consistently elevated in people with untreated gum disease.

Dental Prevention Checklist

- Professional cleaning every 6 months (or 3–4 months if periodontal disease is present)
- Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste — 2 full minutes each time
- Floss or use an interdental brush once daily — gum disease lives between the teeth
- Tell your dentist if you have diabetes, heart disease, or are on blood thinners
- Tell your clinician if you have gum disease — it should be part of your inflammation conversation
- Bleeding gums are not normal — they are an inflammation signal. Do not normalize them.
- Dry mouth from medications? Tell your dentist — it dramatically increases decay risk
- Oral cancer screen at every dental visit from age 40+

Signs that need a dental visit this week: Bleeding on brushing more than occasionally, loose teeth, receding gums, persistent bad breath, new sores or patches, jaw pain.