

Gum disease and heart health.



The link between oral health and general health has been widely researched.¹ Poor oral health and certain health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease are known to have a two-way link.¹ This means that poor oral health can increase your risk of certain health conditions.² Similarly, having certain health conditions can increase your risk of having poor oral health.² Here I'll explain the relationship between gum disease and heart disease.

What is gum disease?

Gum disease describes a range of conditions that affect the tissues surrounding and supporting the teeth.³ This includes the gingiva (gum), bones and the ligaments attached to the teeth.³ It presents in many forms and can be broken down as follows.³

Gingivitis

Gingivitis is a mild form of gum disease.⁴ It causes swelling (inflammation) and redness in your gums.⁴ You may also notice some bleeding whilst brushing your teeth or flossing.⁴ It's usually painless, although some people may experience mild discomfort.⁴

It commonly occurs when there is a build-up of plaque or bacteria on the teeth.⁵ This is usually due to poor oral hygiene such as inadequate tooth brushing and flossing.⁵ However, good oral hygiene measures can help to prevent gingivitis.⁵

Other factors may increase your risk of gingivitis. These include:

- smoking⁴
- diabetes⁴
- certain medications⁴
- genetic susceptibility⁴
- pregnancy⁴
- hormonal fluctuations⁴
- stress⁴
- certain diseases.⁴

Periodontitis

If left untreated, gingivitis can lead to a more serious form of gum disease called periodontitis (periodontal disease).^{6,7}

In periodontitis, bacteria spreads below the gum line, which can lead to inflammation and damage to the tissues and bone around the teeth.^{6,7} Unlike gingivitis, this damage is usually irreversible.⁷ In severe cases, it can result in the loosening and/or loss of teeth.⁷

Common symptoms include:

- persistent bad breath⁷
- an unpleasant taste in your mouth⁷
- loose or shifting teeth⁷
- loss of teeth⁷
- gums that bleed easily⁷
- red, swollen, or inflamed gums⁷
- discomfort or pain⁷
- pockets of pus (abscesses) between your teeth and gums⁷

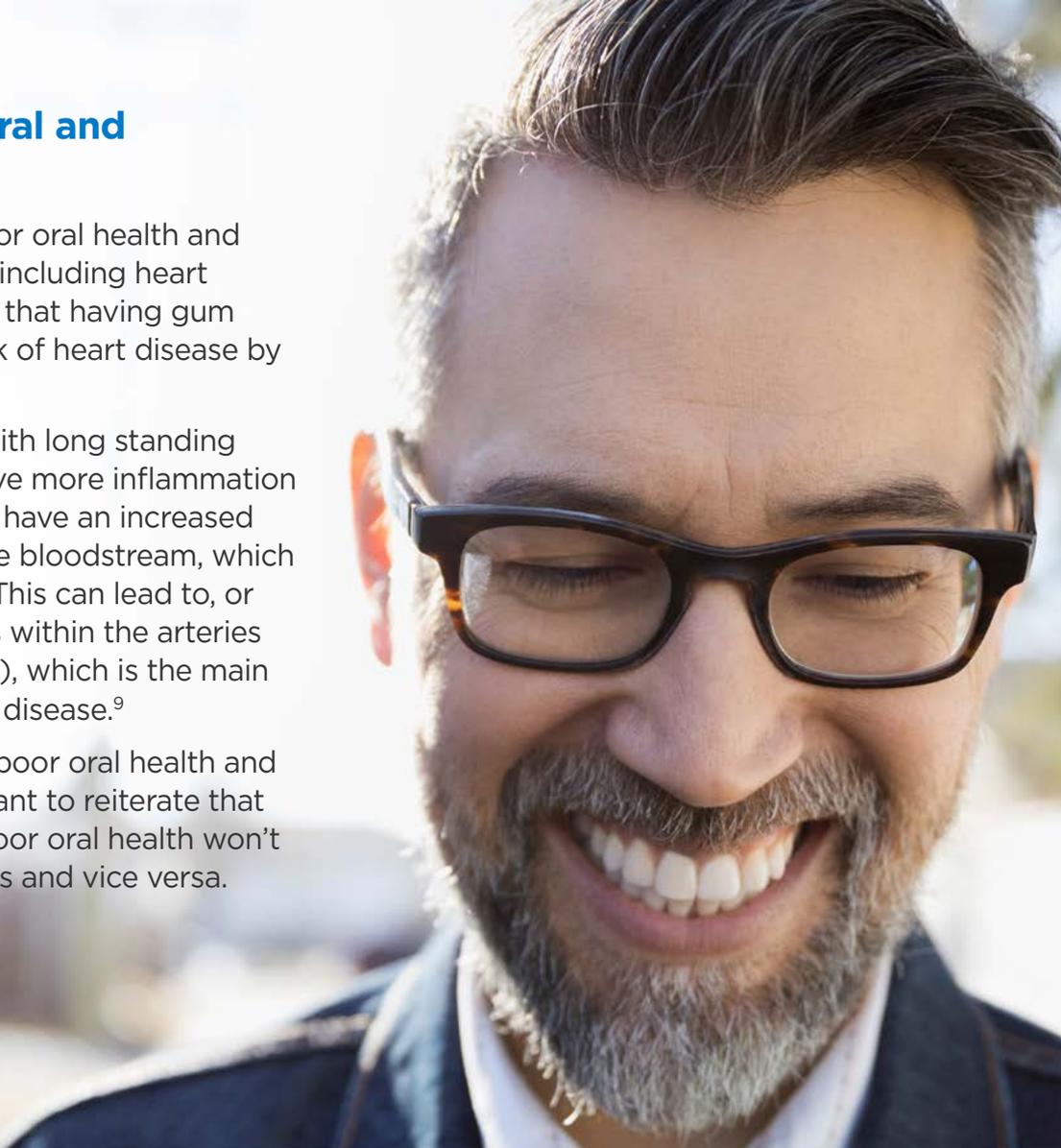
It's important to highlight that **not all patients with periodontal disease present in the same way.** Most people will respond well to improved oral hygiene and professional treatment.⁷

The link between oral and heart health

There's a link between poor oral health and several health conditions, including heart disease.¹ One study found that having gum disease increases your risk of heart disease by around 20 per cent.²

It's thought that people with long standing (chronic) gum disease have more inflammation in their bodies.⁸ They also have an increased presence of bacteria in the bloodstream, which can spread to the heart.⁹ This can lead to, or worsen, the fatty deposits within the arteries (known as atherosclerosis), which is the main underlying cause of heart disease.⁹

Despite the link between poor oral health and general health, it's important to reiterate that many people who have poor oral health won't experience heart problems and vice versa.



Sources

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