

How Disease May Affect Your Mouth

You may be aware that diseases of the mouth can negatively affect your whole body leading to impaired nutrition and weight loss, embarrassment, diminished levels of life satisfaction, and decreased interpersonal communications and relationships.

Today, more than ever before, older adults are keeping their natural teeth. This is particularly the case for older migrant adults. The longer you keep your natural teeth, the longer you are at risk of developing dental caries and gum disease. These diseases can be prevented and treated (See OHRIS 2 & 3). However, if left untreated, these diseases may negatively affect the entire body.

You may also be aware that medication to treat diseases can affect the flow of saliva and therefore affect the mechanism that protects against dental caries and periodontal disease.

Did you know that the symptoms of over

100 diseases may show up in your mouth, or that many affect your capacity to take care of your own mouth?

This information sheet will look at some of the general health conditions, more prevalent in older adults and how they may affect your oral health. Diseases such as hypertension, cancer, diabetes, stroke, arthritis, and autoimmune disorders interfere with care of the mouth, mastication and use of dental prosthesis, and may cause dry mouth, infections and contribute to gum disease.

For example:

Arthritis. Arthritis of the hand can limit the ability to hold and use toothbrushes or to hold the dental floss.

Diabetes. Diabetes may diminish the ability of the body to defend itself against infection. In these circumstances, bacteria that cause gum disease are not easily controlled by the body's defenses.

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Hypertension. This is probably one of the most common medical conditions affecting older adults.

Many medications to control hypertension can produce dry mouth (xerostomia) as a side effect. Prolonged dry mouth can lead to dental decay and gum disease unless the person is particularly diligent in his/her oral hygiene (See OHRIS 7).

Stroke. As a result of a stroke; loss of speech, memory, and muscle paralysis, may occur. When the active hand is affected by paralysis, oral hygiene practices may need to be relearned. If the paralysis affects face muscles, it may be difficult to clean certain zones of the mouth resulting in decay and gum disease.

On the other hand, recent studies point to an increased risk of health disease and stroke in people with advanced gum disease.

Cancer. A number of cancers are treated by radiation or chemotherapy. These treatments can affect the mouth by changing the body's defense mechanisms or inducing dry mouth. Bacteria from the mouth may cause serious life threatening health risks in cancer patients.

Visual changes. Diseases of the eyes that diminish visual clarity and eyes adaptation, might affect the individual's ability to keep his/her mouth in good condition.

Discuss with your GP or oral health provider how general diseases may affect oral health and how can you overcome this situation.