



The Link Between Oral and Overall Health

Your oral health is more important to your overall health than you may realize. Health issues that arise in your mouth can affect the rest of your body. Learn more about this connection and why your dentist plays an important role in your overall health.

During a routine dental exam, your dentist can spot specific signs and symptoms of more than 120 diseases that may suggest serious health issues. Here are health conditions with oral signs and symptoms that can be identified through a dental exam:

- **Anemia:** A mouth with pale gums may lead a dentist to believe a patient has anemia, a condition where the body does not have enough healthy red blood cells circulating throughout its system. Another indicator is a tongue that has lost its normal bumpy texture and now appears smooth.
- **Anorexia nervosa and bulimia:** According to the American Dental Association, dentists may be the first health professionals to notice signs and symptoms of eating disorders. Frequent vomiting and nutrient deficiencies associated with eating disorders can show signs of tooth erosion and teeth may change in color (transparency), shape, length and experience sensitivity to hot and cold. Saliva glands can swell and become enlarged causing the face to look fuller.
- **Diabetes:** Individuals with diabetes are more likely to develop periodontal (gum) disease because diabetes limits the body's natural ability to fight off bacterial infections, including those in the mouth. Signs include: dry mouth, strong breath odor, burning of the tongue, increased tooth decay, inflammation of gums and infections throughout the mouth.
- **Kidney failure:** Kidney disease can be brought on by health issues like diabetes and high blood pressure. It causes oral health issues like dry mouth, delayed tooth development in children, bad breath, chewing issues, increased plaque, presence of gum disease and tooth loss.



- **Deficient immune system (HIV positive):** Your mouth can be the first place in the body to show signs of HIV as an oral infection (like thrush) may indicate that your immune system is not working properly. Those with HIV may show symptoms including oral warts, canker sores, cavities and gum disease. Dry mouth in those with HIV can increase the risk for tooth decay.
- **Heart disease:** Studies indicate a strong connection between gum disease and heart disease, although it is unclear which causes the other. Inflammation in the mouth caused by gum disease as well as pain in the jaw caused by a lack of oxygen to the heart muscle may be a sign of heart disease.
- **Oral cancer:** During a routine dental exam, your dentist will screen for the sixth most-common cancer in the United States - oral cancer. With nearly 50,000 reported cases each year,¹ oral cancer can appear on lips, gums, tongue, inner cheek or other parts of the mouth. If you smoke, drink alcohol frequently or have been exposed to HPV you have an elevated risk for oral cancer. Early detection is important and your dentist is at the forefront of saving lives by routinely performing these checks at regular dental appointments.

Over 90 percent of systemic diseases have oral signs and symptoms. An issue in the mouth could potentially indicate a larger issue in another part of your body. See your dentist for regular checkups and follow these tips to protect your oral and overall health.

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste and floss once daily
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water
- Avoid using tobacco products
- Replace your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months (when the bristles are frayed) and especially after you've been sick
- See your dentist immediately for any unusual oral symptoms

Visit **truassure.com** for more oral health resources and information.

¹American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2017*.