

The window to your overall health is your *oral* health And how to expand the view

Did you hear about the 50-year-old in NY who visited her dentist for a broken tooth from chewing on ice, and five months later, suffered a massive heart attack?

A scholarship coordinator at a New York City high school and mother of four was so consumed with work and family that she ignored her own well-being. Her dentist took one look at her mouth, noticed multiple tooth fractures and rapidly advancing gum (periodontal) disease. The dentist knew those were red flags that indicated an underlying health problem. He urged her to see her primary care doctor.

Her doctor diagnosed and treated for her high blood pressure and anemia, *and five months later, she suffered the heart attack.*



Research has shown that more than 120 diseases originate in the mouth. Gum disease is linked to a host of illnesses including heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, osteoporosis, and rheumatoid arthritis. By combing through 1,000-plus medical histories, researchers at the University of North Carolina School of Dentistry found that *people with gum disease were twice as likely as others to die from a heart attack and three times as likely to have a stroke.*

At Howard Dental Center, it is our fundamental belief that oral health cannot and should not be separated from overall health. This is why we focus on integrated care – working hand in glove with our patients’ medical professionals. While that works for our specifically-defined population, there is a disconnect in the broader population. (*Does your doctor talk to your dentist?*)

Think of the benefits if your “medical home” included *oral* healthcare! Continuity of care would be improved. As healthcare moves from a paper to an electronic environment, accessibility to all of a patient’s health records (with prior consent of the patient) would be possible, minimizing duplication of services. With proper training, non-dental health-care professionals (such as nurses and physician assistants) could screen for oral disease and deliver preventive services. Early intervention could save lives *and* money. Dental and medical insurance coverage could be packaged together with an emphasis on prevention for an overall cost savings.

Good health is a major resource for social, economic, and personal development. With the existing system, we all bear the costs of this lack of integration. While the system may take time to change, there is no time like the present to make sure you have healthy habits in place: 1) brush your teeth after every meal, 2) floss once a day and 3) see a dentist regularly.

Resources

<http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/features/oral-health-affects-wellness>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/dental/DE00001>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/01/oral-hygiene-health-problems_n_914565.html#s319360&title=Reduced Risk Of