

Poor oral health 'raises risk of mental illness by a third'

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GUM disease increases the risk of developing mental health problems by more than a third, a study has found. Patients who were diagnosed with the common condition, which affects nine in 10 adults in the UK, were more likely to have heart problems, autoimmune disease and mental health issues.

Their likelihood of developing mental health problems such as depression and anxiety was 37 per cent higher than those who had "healthy mouths", the researchers found.

Likewise, patients with gum disease were 33 per cent more likely to develop an autoimmune condition such as arthritis, Type 1 diabetes or psoriasis, a skin condition.

They were also 18 per cent more likely to have heart or blood problems, except Type 2 diabetes where the risk was on average 26 per cent higher.

Researchers at the University of Birmingham analysed the GP records of 64,379 patients with a history of gum disease. Of these, 60,995 had gingivitis and 3,384 had periodontitis, the condition that develops if gum disease is left untreated, which can lead to tooth loss.

These records were then compared with 251,161 healthy patients who had not been diagnosed with gum disease. Over an average of three years, patients with bad gums were more likely to suffer from further physical and mental health conditions.

The study, one of the largest of its kind, was published in The BMJ. Dr Joht Singh Chandan said: "Poor oral health is extremely common, both here in the UK and globally.

"When oral ill-health progresses, it can lead to a substantially reduced quality of life. However, until now, not much

has been known about the association of poor oral health and many chronic diseases, particularly mental ill health."

Almost half of the UK'S adult population have a degree of periodontitis that is not reversible.

Dr Dawit Zemedikun, co-first author, said: "Our study was the most comprehensive study of its kind and the results provided vital confirmation of evidence which has previously either been lacking in strength or has had gaps – particularly the association between oral ill-health and mental ill-health."