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## POOR ORAL HYGIENE CAN AFFECT OVERALL HEALTH

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DID you know that having poor oral health can have dire effects on our general health as well? More and more evidence point to links between oral disease and diseases affecting our body.

A neglected mouth can have dangerous implications on our overall health, especially non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases, a leading cause of death and disability worldwide, including in Malaysia.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, in his foreword in the Malaysian National Strategic Plan for Non-Communicable Diseases 2016-2025, said “NCDs are the leading cause of death and morbidity among adults in Malaysia, and have resulted in heavy emotional as well as increasing medical costs for patients”.

Facts and figures from the National Health and Morbidity Survey in 2019 further lend weight to this: One in five Malaysian adults, or 3.9 million people, have diabetes; three in 10 adults, or 6.4 million people, have hypertension; and, four in 10 adults, or eight million people, have raised cholesterol levels.

Five in 10 Malaysian adults are either overweight (30 per cent) or obese (20 per cent), factors contributing to the explosive increase in NCDs.

The National Oral Health Survey of Adults 2010 also found a huge prevalence of oral disease in nine out of 10 Malaysians experiencing the two main diseases of the mouth — dental caries (cavities) at 89 per cent and gum disease at 94 per cent.

The scientific evidence that oral disease, systemic disease and poor oral health among Malaysians contribute to a rise in NCDs should weigh significant in any effort to reduce the burden of NCDs.

There is a need to address poor oral health among Malaysians.

Inflammation caused by periodontal or gum disease allows the entry of bacteria and plaque into the bloodstream. This can cause inflammation of the heart’s blood vessels and potentially increasing the risk of stroke and heart disease.

Periodontal disease is also associated with diabetes and may increase the risk for diabetic complications. Studies have shown that treatment of periodontal disease improves blood glucose levels.

Poor maternal oral health, especially periodontal disease, has been linked to an increased risk of preterm and low birth weight babies. In addition, periodontal disease may be associated with gastrointestinal and pancreatic cancers.

Oral infections are associated with an increased risk of pneumonia. The inflammatory substances released during gum infections have also been linked to inflammation in the brain that could be responsible for Alzheimer’s disease.

Many NCDs share the same risk factors as oral diseases. A poor diet, especially one with high sugar, can lead to diabetes. And obesity is also one of the main causes of caries.

Tobacco use is implicated in the causation of periodontal disease. Together with alcohol use, tobacco use is also implicated in the development of cancers, including oral and oropharyngeal cancer.

As poor oral health can have unwanted consequences on overall health, it is important that we practise good oral hygiene. An easy way to do so is to practise “BRUSH” – brush your teeth twice a day, rinse your mouth after meals, use fluoridated toothpaste, screen your mouth once a year and have your treats with main meals.

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