- Dental care

Bad oral hygiene linked to cancer, heart attacks

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It's normal to have bacteria in your mouth. But harmful bacteria have been linked to a host of health problems.

Medical scientist Glenda Davison and microbiologist Yvonne Prince, who have researched the oral cavity, explain why it's so important to practice good oral hygiene.

Poor oral hygiene can lead to serious diseases.

In fact, bacteria in the mouth may lead to the development of liver disease, renal failure, cancers, heart disease, and hypertension.

This is because the mouth is home to the second largest microbial community in humans, after the gut.

The mouth is home to over 700 species of bacteria, fungi, viruses, and protozoa.

They thrive in and around the teeth, the gums, tongue, palate, and saliva.

Indeed, there are over 39 trillion microbes in the human body in the stomach, skin, lung, seminal and vaginal fluid, eyes, scalp, and mouth and so on.

They outnumber more than the 30 trillion human cells.

They may cause other diseases when the acidity or alkalinity (pH) in the mouth changes or when the temperature and oxygen level encourage the abnormal growth of bacteria.

An overabundance of these bacteria may lead to the development of diseases.

The journey may start in a simple oral health issue: gum disease. When it develops into something more serious — like periodontitis, bleeding gums and tooth decay — the gum gets eroded to the bone.

This is the time when inflammatory molecules called cytokines play a more dangerous role — when they enter the blood stream.

Type 2 diabetes develops. Atherosclerosis or thickening of the arteries may follow.

Over 1,000 species of bacteria may reside in the large intestine. No problem: These bacteria are important in digestion, absorption, immunity, and protection against other harmful bacteria.

However, an abnormal gut biome may cause autoimmunity, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and even Alzheimer's.

These oral health issues may be avoided by simple measures such as going to the dentist regularly for checkups, at least twice or once a year.

Brushing the teeth religiously prevents plaque from developing. Carbohydrates and sugar should be avoided as much as possible as they encourage the growth of bacteria in the mouth.

A balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables is a big help. So is regular physical activity. In other words — healthy habits should be encouraged at all times.

Here's good advice from the Mayo Clinic:

* Brush your teeth at least twice a day for two minutes each time. Use a brush with soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste. Brush your tongue too.

* Clean between your teeth daily with floss, a water flosser or other products made for that purpose.

* Eat a healthy diet and limit sugary food and drinks.
* Replace your toothbrush every three to four months. Do it sooner if bristles are worn or flare out.
* See a dentist at least once a year for checkups and cleanings. Your dentist may suggest visits or cleanings more often, depending on your situation. You might be sent to a gum specialist, called a periodontist, if your gums need more care. * Don't use tobacco.
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