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**Alpha Dental Excellence**  
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Dr. Arpan Patel discusses the many health issues linked to gum disease, ranging from heart disease and stroke to diabetes and cancer.

# Making Connections

**Alpha Dental Excellence** helps patients understand the astonishing link between oral health and whole-body health.

**IF THE EYES ARE THE WINDOW TO THE SOUL, THEN THE MOUTH IS A WINDOW INTO THE HEALTH OF THE BODY.**

Arpan N. Patel, D.M.D., and his team at Alpha Dental Excellence in Langhorne, stresses this point to each patient who sits in his dental chair. While Alpha Dental Excellence offers the full menu of general and cosmetic dentistry services, including root canal therapy, oral extractions, and dental implants, he believes the most important service he provides is to safeguard each patient's overall health.

"There is a very strong connection between oral health and systemic health," Dr. Patel says. "As many as 57 systemic health conditions have been linked to poor oral health. We want all of our patients to be aware of the link, and to educate them to do what they can to stay healthy."

The primary culprit is periodontal disease, also known as gum disease, a common but serious gum infection that damages the soft tissue. Without proper treatment, gum disease can destroy the bone that supports the teeth, cause tooth loss, and contribute to a host of serious and potentially lethal health conditions.

When someone develops gum disease, the body's internal defenses send blood to the infected area. As a result, the bacteria from the mouth can get into the bloodstream and cause systemic inflammation. This process has been linked to conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, as well as Alzheimer's disease, cancer, and osteoporosis, among others.

Dr. Patel cites some sobering statistics from reliable sources, ranging from the American Academy of Family Physicians, the



***My top goal as a dentist is to make sure patients first have a healthy mouth, then a functional mouth, then a cosmetically appealing mouth.***

—Dr. Arpan Patel,  
Alpha Dental Excellence

American Academy of Oral Systemic Health, Harvard University, *The Journal of the American Dental Association*, and the Mayo Clinic (see chart). The statistics underscore a grim reality: An unhealthy mouth significantly increases the likelihood of premature death.

The good news is that gum disease is treatable and, in fact, largely preventable.

"In addition to screening a patient's medical history, we do a gum screening to determine their exposure to gum disease," he says. "We also take X-rays to see what bone levels they have and measure the pockets around the teeth, which collect bacteria. There are over 1,000 breeds of bacteria in dental plaque, and when they multiply it can be very difficult to control. If we determine someone does have excessive bacterial inflammation, we can then do a gum cleaning or deep cleaning to address the issue."

Once the disease has been dealt with, Dr. Patel and his team then tackle the next phase of treatment: prevention through education.

"Our goal is to train the patient to make sure the problem does not come back again," Dr. Patel says. "We do that by monitoring the situation closely and teaching them the proper

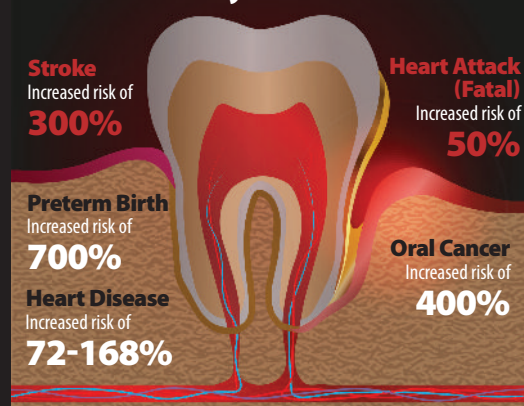
way to take care of their teeth. As many as 70 to 75 percent of Americans do not floss on a regular basis, and that contributes to the high incidence of gum disease. Flossing is not an easy habit to adopt, which is why I always recommend a water pick—sort like a power wash for the mouth. That gives the patient a clean slate and eliminates a lot of future problems."

### Signs and Symptoms

Dr. Patel suggests many patients with gum disease might not even know they have it. Symptoms include persistent bad breath, sores in the mouth, and red, swollen, or tender gums, as well as signs of bleeding when a patient brushes or flosses. More advanced stages of the disease include receding gums, loose or shifting teeth, and, ultimately, tooth loss.

"If you don't take care of your teeth, you are likely to lose them," he says. "This will affect not only your smile and your ability to eat,

## Gum Disease Increases the Risk of Many Conditions



Source: [wellnessmama.com/3541/gum-disease](http://wellnessmama.com/3541/gum-disease)

but it can also take years off your life. The Mayo Clinic did a study a few years back, and they proved that patients with missing teeth live an average of 10 years less than those who have a full set of teeth."

Alpha Dental Excellence creates a customized treatment plan for each patient, built specifically around his or her needs. The practice can also help individuals who suffer from obstructive sleep apnea, a potentially serious disorder in which the relaxation of the throat muscles causes an individual's breathing to repeatedly stop and start while sleeping.

Much like periodontal disease, sleep apnea has been connected to several other serious health issues, including cardiac problems, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome, as well as daytime fatigue. Clinicians often prescribe a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine to address the issue, but most patients dislike the therapy. As a result, most people refrain from using it. Dr. Patel can prescribe a custom oral appliance designed to keep a patient's airway open. Oral-appliance therapy is an effective alternative to the CPAP, he says, and most medical insurances are "on board with it."

"If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that our health is our No. 1 asset," he says. "My top goal as a dentist is to make sure patients first have a healthy mouth, then a functional mouth, and then a cosmetically appealing mouth. Only when those first two standards are met will we start worrying about what the smile looks like. I always tell patients that it never hurts to know. We offer free consultations for people to come in and find out what's happening in their mouth and what we can do to help them." ■

## How Gum Disease Affects Whole-body Health

### STROKE

People with severe gum disease are three to four times as likely to die from stroke. (Mayo Clinic)

### HEART DISEASE

People with gum disease are two times as likely to die from heart attack. (Mayo Clinic)

### DIABETES

Diabetes and bleeding gums increases the risk of premature death by 400 to 700 percent. Ninety-three percent of people with gum disease are at risk for diabetes. (American Academy of Oral Systemic Health)

### PREGNANCY COMPLICATIONS

Pregnant women with gum disease have a one-in-seven chance of giving birth to a healthy child of normal size. (AAOSH)

### ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Tooth loss and gum disease increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease. (Mayo Clinic)

### OSTEOPOROSIS AND BONE FRACTURES

People with gum disease may be at a higher risk of osteoporosis and subsequent bone fractures.

### RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS

Poor oral hygiene can increase the risk for pneumonia and respiratory infections. (The Journal of the American Dental Association)

### CANCER

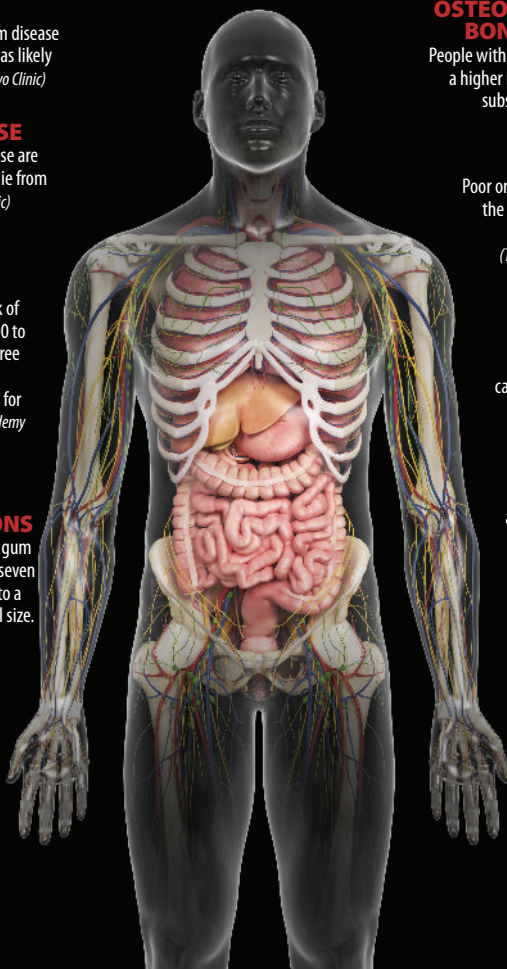
Gum disease increases pancreatic and kidney cancer risk by 62 percent. (Harvard University)

### RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Research has found an association between gum disease and rheumatoid arthritis. (American Academy of Family Physicians)

### MEN'S ISSUES

Men with a history of gum disease are at higher risk of prostate cancer and three times more likely to suffer from erectile dysfunction.



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