



MEN'S PERIODONTAL HEALTH

Don't ignore your gums, guys

Shorter life spans. Greater risk for heart attacks. Higher rates of cancer. As if men don't have it tough enough, studies report that periodontal disease is more prevalent and severe in males than in females. In fact, the January, 1999 *Journal of Periodontology* reports that at the very least, 34 percent of the U.S. male population age 30 to 54 has periodontitis, compared to 23 percent of females.

Part of the reason for this is attributed to poorer oral hygiene among males than females. Further reasoning for the gender difference remains unclear, but may have something to do with a protective effect of female hormones.

So why should men be con-

cerned? First of all, periodontal disease is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. After age 65, almost 25 percent of men have no remaining natural teeth. However, don't think tooth loss is a problem you won't face until old age. Tooth loss due to periodontal disease can strike people in their 30s and younger.

And maybe more importantly, the pool of research linking periodontal disease to far more serious health threats, such as heart disease, respiratory disease and diabetes, continues to grow.

One study found that people with advanced periodontal disease are 4.5 times more likely to have a chronic respiratory disease. Another study found that people

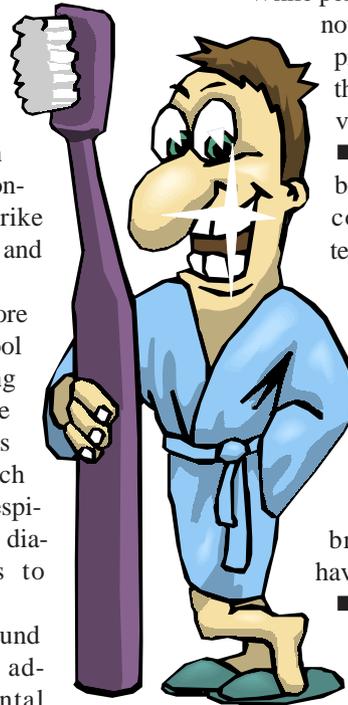
with periodontal disease may have nearly twice the risk of having a fatal heart attack as those without periodontal disease.

While periodontal disease cannot always be avoided, proper oral hygiene is the best means of prevention.

- Daily flossing breaks up the bacterial colonies between teeth, and proper brushing prevents plaque buildup.

- Professional cleanings at least twice a year are necessary to remove calculus from places your toothbrush and floss may have missed.

- And, because there are often no symptoms of the disease in its early stages, a trip to a periodontist can determine if you have periodontal disease. ❖



Just for men

Face your fears

According to a 1999 AAP online poll, 47 percent of periodontists say that their male patients are more often fearful of periodontal treatment, while only 11 percent find their female patients to be the more fearful gender. Share your anxiety with your dentist, periodontist and their staffs. They are prepared to help. The survey also revealed that the top origins of dental fear are family and friends or a personal bad experience more than 10 years ago. Realize that advances in the ability to treat periodontal conditions in a comfortable way have come a long way in recent years.

Chew on this

Smokeless tobacco products such as snuff and chewing tobacco increase your risk for oral cancer. In fact, oral mucosal lesions are found in 50 to 60 percent of smokeless tobacco users.

And, smokeless tobacco use has been associated with more severe and rapidly progressing periodontal disease.

Don't skip the trip

Dental care utilization rates are lower among men than women. According to a 1997 American Dental Association/Gallup phone survey, one in four men reported they hadn't visited a dentist in the past year. In addition, a study in the June, 1999 *Journal of Periodontology* found that well over half of males under age 40 who have undergone nonsurgical periodon-

tal treatment are likely to drop out of periodontal maintenance therapy. Periodontal diseases are chronic diseases, and without this careful, ongoing treatment, disease can and often does recur.

Make it a mate ritual

One study, which examined 58 elderly couples, found that long-married partners had strikingly similar tooth-care habits. So men may want to begin flossing with their significant others before bed as part of their evening ritual. Good oral care will help ward off periodontal disease and tooth loss. ❖

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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