

[IMAGE]

Diseased Gums Harm Overall Health

Periodontitis, or gum disease, affects 15-30% of all adults. Besides causing tooth loss and bad breath, it has recently been shown to be a possible risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Infected pockets that develop in poorly maintained gums may release inflammatory bacteria, or endotoxins, into the bloodstream. A recent study in the *Journal of Periodontology* evaluated whether levels of harmful endotoxins are higher in those with poor gum health.

To determine if gentle chewing can cause the release of endotoxins into the bloodstream, the authors of this study examined approximately 70 people with varying levels of periodontal disease: severe, moderate, or none. Blood samples were collected and evaluated for endotoxins before and immediately after chewing gum.

Overall, endotoxin levels in the blood were significantly higher after chewing in all three groups. But levels of these bacteria were much higher in the people with severe gum disease than in the other groups, as were "positive" cases of endotoxemia. Furthermore, patients with severe gum disease were more than three times more likely to have endotoxins in their blood than were those with healthy gums.

Diseased gums may be an underestimated source of chronic bacterial infection and disease. Follow the American Dental Association's recommendations on gum health: Get regular dental check-ups, brush and floss twice per day, and avoid using tobacco. Some signs of unhealthy gums are redness, swelling, bleeding, and persistent bad breath.

Reference:

Geerts SO, Nys M, De Mol P, et al. Systemic release of endotoxins induced by gentle mastication: Association with periodontitis severity. *Journal of Periodontology* 2002;73(1), pp. 73-78.

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