

Baby boomers benefit from good dental health — article by Scott Keith

Many of us have been given the lecture from our dentist or dental hygienist: Floss and floss often. Frankly, it's easy to let up on this practice. The result: Bleeding gums, gingivitis and periodontal disease. Not only can these conditions lead to tooth loss, but your overall health could suffer.

Gingivitis, according to Dr. Ramin Tabib, is one of the most common infections of the mouth. A sticky film forms on the teeth; sugary and starchy foods can react with bacteria in your mouth. Plaque forms. If the plaque is not removed within a few days, it can harden and form tartar. "It's like barnacles underneath a ship," says Tabib, who is a faculty member of NYU College of Dentistry. If left for a long time, tissue lining can break down, leading to a pocket formation.



Image via Wikipedia

A symptom of gingivitis is bleeding gums. As you're brushing your teeth, you may notice a reddish color on your toothbrush or in the sink (after rinsing). If this problem persists, see your dentist. While some people may dismiss bleeding gums, Tabib says gingivitis is a serious problem. In an interview with Men and Health, It's a Guy Thing, Tabib says, "It's a low-grade inflammation. A low-grade inflammation is something the body is constantly fighting. It can systemically cause problems. It should be taken very seriously." Adds Tabib, there's a link between gum disease and heart disease. Tabib's wife, Dr. Elisa Mello, says bacteria in your mouth, if it gets into your blood, can travel throughout your system. The two say families should not share toothbrushes.

Gingivitis can lead to periodontal disease. Tabib says, "Periodontal disease is an infection that's starting to affect the attachment level for the tooth. Gingivitis is affecting the marginal gum line around the tooth. It doesn't affect the support of the tooth." The tooth loosens once the support starts to break down. That's when a patient has to consider options such as implants.

Mello, who is a Clinical Assistant Professor at NYU College of Dentistry, says gingivitis can happen at any age, but a child, with more spaces between teeth, is less likely to get the condition. Even so, it's always important to teach your youngsters good oral hygiene.

Other conditions can lead to gingivitis, such as leukemia. Tabib says hormonal changes, during pregnancy, will cause a proliferation of certain bacteria. It's recommended that pregnant women get more teeth cleaning. Poor nutrition and smoking can lead to a higher risk of periodontal disease.

You need to stay aware of gingivitis and periodontal disease. Tabib says you need to brush and floss properly mornings and evenings, but especially evenings. At night, your saliva shuts down. Saliva has protective factors, according to Tabib, that help prevent gum disease and cavity formation. Tabib also recommends you see the dentist for a professional cleaning because gingivitis is easily treatable.

The cost benefit of good oral hygiene can be tremendous. Tabib says, "You can really be your own dental insurance if you develop really good oral hygiene habits early on." Tabib recalls a study that says flossing your teeth can increase your life span by 6.4 years.

Visit Dr. Tabib and Dr. Mello at www.nycsmiledesign.com