

Flossing could save your life

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Could flossing save your life? Recent studies from numerous universities and independent research organizations say that it just might. In a world of organic groceries and 24 hour gyms popping up on every block, it's safe to say that overall health is on the collective mind of America. This month, we're dedicating our dental discussion to the specific health needs of men. Specifically, it's time to address dental care in the context of whole-body health. It's time to remember the importance of oral health.

According to the Mayo Clinic, the top ten killers of American men are: heart disease, cancer, accidents, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, influenza/pneumonia, suicide, kidney disease, and Alzheimer's. You may have noticed that cavities or gingivitis are not on this list, but don't throw out your dental floss just yet. The health of our teeth and gums has a dramatic impact on our whole-body health! The most common disease affecting the gums is gingivitis (meaning inflammation of the gums), but if not treated, gingivitis will progress to periodontitis. Periodontitis is an infection of the tissues (bone, gums, periodontal ligaments) that surround the teeth and hold them in place. Periodontal disease, while effectively treated by your dentist, has been linked to several of these top ten killers.

For starters, let's review the basic association between oral and whole-body health. Our mouths are naturally home to an entire microbiological ecosystem of bacteria. This ecosystem is maintained by our eating and hygiene habits. Plaque that builds on your teeth between brushing is layers of bacteria (mainly *Streptococcus mutans*), that multiply every 30 minutes. The metabolic byproducts of these bacteria are acids and toxins that erode our teeth and cause cavities. When not kept in check, these bacteria form hard crusts called tartar and irritate the surrounding tissues causing gum infection (gingivitis) then gum disease (periodontitis). This is what causes your gums to bleed when you brush and floss. The toxins and acids from this bacterial infection then have access to your bloodstream and can thereby relocate to cause trouble elsewhere. A study published in the *American Journal of Periodontology* reveals that patients with severe periodontitis have 400% of the harmful bacterial byproducts than those with moderate to no periodontal disease. This issue strongly affects men's health as 34% of males age 30-54 have periodontal disease compared to only 23% of females.

It's a well-known and oft-lamented fact that heart disease is the Number One killer of men in the United States. As such our collective education about heart disease teaches us that if we eat healthy and exercise we won't have to worry about it. However, it takes

many parts to make one body. A recent study published in the *Compendium* (Genco, et al) states that patients with periodontitis are 168% as likely to develop heart disease. A study published in the *Journal of Periodontology* (1996, 67; Beck et al) says that a patient with bone loss around the teeth (a result of periodontitis) have a 50% higher incidence of FATAL coronary heart disease. Have you flossed today?

American killer number two is cancer.

When you think of cancer in men, oral cancer may not be the first to come to mind, but considering the above mentioned prevalence of periodontal disease in men, maybe it should. Oral cancer has a 5-year survival rate of only 57% according to the American Cancer Society and is contingent on early diagnosis. While the main cause of oral cancer is tobacco use, a study by the University of Buffalo, New York has shown a significant association between periodontitis and oral precancerous cells and tumors.

Further down the top ten list are stroke, diabetes, pneumonia, and kidney disease. Good periodontal health, believe it or not, improves your chances with all of these. Patients with periodontal infections are 2.5 times as likely to experience a stroke (Grau et al). Treatment of periodontal disease decreases the level of glycosylated hemoglobin in the blood serum decreasing your risk of diabetes according to the 1997 Periodontal Disease & Human Health Symposium. Just as diabetes and kidney disease are related, periodontitis has also been shown to be a significant aggravator of diabetic kidney disease. Finally, with elevated levels of bacteria in the mouth, a person with periodontal disease is more likely to aspirate these into the lower lungs and develop pneumonia.

Six out of the top 10 killers of men in the United States are affected by the health of your gums. You can maintain healthy gums by brushing twice a day, flossing every day, and seeing your dentist for regular cleanings every 6 months. When diagnosed early, periodontal disease is easily and effectively treated. In more advanced stages it can only be treated by a specially trained dentist or periodontist using surgical techniques.



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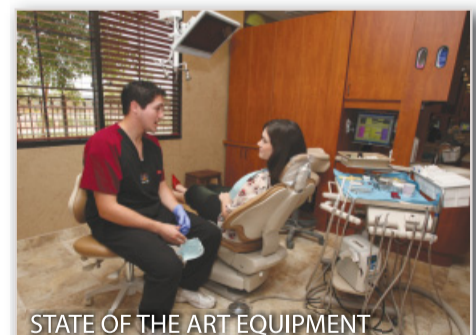
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Dr. David Rush attended Brigham Young University for Undergrad degrees and received his Doctorate from the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Dentistry. After graduation, Dr. Rush and his family moved to Arizona, and opened Ahwatukee Family Dental. Dr. Rush is a member of the Central Arizona Dental Association, Arizona Dental Association, The Dental Organization for Conscious Sedation, The Academy of General Dentistry, and The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. Just recently, Dr. Rush opened Fulton Ranch Dental in Chandler, located at 4909 South Alma School Road, Suite 1. You can reach the Chandler office at 480.895.7070. Dr. Rush's Ahwatukee Family Dental office is located at 11022 South 51st Street, Suite 105. The phone number there is 480.893.7674



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