

HEALTHY LIVING

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Healthy Mouth, Healthy Body

*Dr. Chicvak, DDS
provides information on
how the mouth affects
the whole body*

By Katie Piacentini

Many people who are focused on taking good care of themselves to have a healthy body might not always realize the importance of having a healthy mouth. Dr. John E. Chicvak, DDS, MAGD, who has a private practice in Great Neck and is an attendant at North Shore/LIJ, recently spoke to *Healthy Living Digest* about the mouth-body connection.

There are connections between periodontal disease and specific health problems, Dr. Chicvak explained. According to the American Dental Association, periodontal disease is a chronic infection caused by bacteria, which begins when certain bacteria in plaque produce toxins and enzymes that irritate the gums and causes inflammation. Dr. Chicvak said that periodontal disease also has a link to chronic inflammation and infection in other parts of the body. He said that the inflammatory process of periodontal disease elevates C-reactive-protein (CRP) levels, which enters into the bloodstream. Some evidence suggests that oral bacteria could have a link to cardiovascular problems and heart disease, he added.

Infections can also raise blood sugar levels, which means that if a diabetic person has periodontal disease, they might have difficulty controlling their blood sugar. In turn, diabetics more likely to develop periodontal disease, Dr. Chicvak said, because diabetes can lower the body's resistance to infection, making periodontal disease more severe.

Patients undergoing cancer therapy need to make sure they have dental care beforehand, Dr. Chicvak said, since certain cancer therapies can make a person weaker, which opens them up more to infections. He noted that if emergency dental care is needed, it could even force the patient to interrupt their cancer therapy, so it is a good idea to visit the dentist before beginning cancer treatment.

For pregnant women, oral health is very important, Dr. Chicvak said. He explained that there is a correlation between poor oral health and low birth weight and preterm babies. Also, gingivitis is pretty common as a result of hormonal and salivary changes, he said. "Dental health should be in good shape before a woman gets pregnant," Dr. Chicvak said. This is particularly important in order to avoid a situation where emergency dental care would be needed.

To prevent gum disease, Dr. Chicvak said that good oral hygiene needs to be in place at home. "Your teeth could be spotless after a dental cleaning, but if you don't keep it up at home, it doesn't matter," he said. This includes brushing your teeth for two minutes twice a day and flossing before bed. If a person develops gingivitis, Dr. Chicvak said that it is reversible with treatment. He said that if a person with gingivitis works on better oral hygiene at home, within two weeks they would begin to see positive changes.