

Take Care of Your Mouth and Be Smarter and Healthier, Really!

Notice I did not say “be smarter and take care of your mouth”. A new study from the University of North Carolina shows having good dental health can make you smarter. Want to be smarter? Start by reading the rest of his article!

This new study looked at brain function in people aged 45-64. A large group of these people were tested thinking and memory tests. These people were also examined dentally for whether they had all teeth, some teeth, or no teeth. Those that had teeth were evaluated as to the health of the gum and bone around the teeth. Other factors were such as socio-economic level and significant medical conditions were taken into account.

The people who had a healthy mouth scored higher in cognitive (thinking) and memory tests than those who had lost most or all of their teeth. They also scored higher than those who still had their teeth but who had significant periodontitis (infection of the gums and bone around their teeth). This is the first study to show that dental problems may actually be able to impair brain function.

Now let’s cover a little background information. I have written before how having good dental health can help your general health, which is sometimes called the “oral-systemic health connection”. This shows up in two main ways.

The more teeth people have lost, the more likely they are to be obese, diabetic, and have high blood pressure. You would think people eating with dentures would lose weight since dentures do not chew nearly as well as teeth. The opposite is true though. People with dentures tend to have a much softer and less healthy diet since most have a hard time chewing healthy foods like lean meats, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

The second way is the fact that periodontitis is associated with higher rates of many other medical problems. These include heart disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia, some cancers, pneumonia in elderly and premature births in younger women. The cause seems to be that the inflammation and bacteria from the periodontitis can literally spread throughout the body.

Incidentally, the signs of periodontitis are red and bleeding gums, loose or shifting teeth, chronic bad breath, and swelling or pus around the teeth. Periodontitis is also the most common reason for people to lose all their teeth and end up in dentures.

So here's the moral to the story. If you want to be smarter, and healthier, take care of your mouth. The ability to chew well for better nutrition is important. So is the prevention of oral inflammation and infection, which can affect the rest of the body.

Brush and floss (or water pick) daily. See your dentist regularly. Treat your gum disease or cavity issues. Don't wait until it hurts or you are probably too late. If you already are missing teeth, replace them, with dental implants if possible, as they function just like real teeth. Even if you already have dentures, they often can be stabilized with implants to greatly improve their function to allow a more healthy diet.

Dr. David Ward practices comprehensive general dentistry in Big Spring. He has been awarded a Fellowship in the Institute for Advanced Laser Dentistry for laser periodontal surgery and a Fellowship and Mastership for dental implant surgery with the American and International Dental Implant Associations