



e-quilibrium

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Gums

Mind-body dualism, that is, the perspective that mental health and physical health are separate entities, used to be prevalent in the health care arena. Either a problem was emotional (e.g., depression) or physical (e.g., coronary artery disease). It is now widely understood that emotional and physical processes are interactive and closely intertwined.

It could also be argued that there has been a mouth-body dualism in health. This refers to the tendency whereby the mouth was largely been under the purview of dentists, while physicians concerned themselves with the rest of the body. The underlying assumption for mouth-body dualism was that dental health and physical health are basically independent of one another. It is now understood that this is clearly not accurate.

Gum health affects more than the mouth. The two most common forms of periodontal disease are gingivitis and periodontitis. Gingivitis is infection in the soft tissue around the teeth, whereas periodontitis additionally involves the supporting structures of the teeth. The chronic inflammation present with these oral infections has been associated with a number of other health problems, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, pregnancy complications (prematurity, low birth weight), and diabetes. These correlations have varying degrees of research support, and some of the links are controversial. Certainly one cannot say that periodontal disease causes these other illnesses, and indeed some of these other illnesses increase risk for periodontal disease. Nonetheless,

there is enough research supporting a link between oral and general health to warrant increased attention to oral health.

There are a number of behavioral risk factors for periodontal disease. Obviously, poor dental hygiene is the most important of these. Other behavior risk factors include smoking, poor nutrition, and stress.

Behaviors that reduce one's risk for periodontal disease include brushing teeth at least twice a day, flossing daily, getting regular dental examinations and care, and using antimicrobial mouth rinses. Additionally, not smoking, consuming a healthy diet, and effectively managing stress are also important.

Our bodies are made up of interconnected structures, organs, and systems. In a previous edition of **e-equilibrium** that discussed brain health, I stated that what is good for the heart is good for the brain. This month's message is that what is good for the mouth is good for the rest of the body.

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