

## The Dental / Medical Connection

Almost every dental journal that crosses my desk has an article discussing the link between dental health and overall health. The current catchphrase for this relationship is the dental/medical connection. The short version is that people with healthy teeth and gums enjoy better overall health than people with missing teeth and gum disease.

There are actual studies that demonstrate a positive correlation between the number of teeth retained and the quality of one's life. In other words, the more teeth you have and the better shape they are in; the healthier you generally are. This relationship has much to do with diet, self confidence, the ability to communicate effectively, and self esteem.

Along these same lines, it has been shown that people with effective tooth replacement treatments are healthier than those without. Whether teeth are replaced with implants, dentures, or partial plates; a good set of teeth trumps a bad set. Well designed and constructed tooth replacements allow for a healthier diet, as well as the ability to speak and communicate better. Ask anyone with dental implants how much easier it makes their life.

There is a well documented link between gum disease and multiple other health problems. I've explored this subject before and do not want to beat a dead horse. Suffice to say that healthy gums help to prevent or control diabetes, heart disease, and multiple other systemic health problems. Gum disease is a chronic infection that damages your body and must be treated.

The temporomandibular joints are also key to a healthy body. Jaw joints that do not work or line up correctly can lead to headaches, ear pain, fibromyalgia, and other chronic pain conditions. Severe TMD patients can also have trouble eating healthy diets due to limited opening and pain.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea is a serious medical condition that can cause heart attacks, strokes, auto accidents, and other issues we'd all like to avoid. A person's bite, airway, tongue, and jaw joints can all contribute to the obstruction that blocks oxygen flow during sleep and leads to OSA. Dental appliances can be fabricated to treat some forms of sleep apnea.

The more we learn, the more we realize that quality healthcare is a team approach. Doctors, dentists, chiropractors, massage therapists, and assorted other specialists should all be onboard to keep our bodies in top shape. Who knew that a trip to the dentist could save your life?

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send questions and comments to Drs. Parrish at [www.ParrishDental.com](http://www.ParrishDental.com).