

Helen Tosch

Flossing Article; Published on nmh.org

Flossing Each Day Keeps the Doctor Away?

Most of us have heard the old saying “an apple a day keeps the doctor away.” But have you heard that flossing may help prevent many common ailments, including heart disease? It’s true, according to a study in the *Journal of Periodontology* that confirms what others have stated – people who have periodontal disease are also at greater risk for systemic diseases, including cardiovascular disease.

Maybe you’re a bit skeptical. I know I was when I first heard about the results. I thought there must be a correlation between heart disease and gum disease because people who neglect their oral health are likely to neglect their overall health. And, if that’s true, could these results prove a cause and effect relationship? The answer is yes and no.

The Evidence

Currently, there is no definitive proof that periodontal disease actually causes heart disease. But there is proof that the bacteria in the mouth, when released into the bloodstream, can lead to hardening of the arteries, which, in turn, can lead to heart attack and stroke. One study released by the University of Buffalo showed that periodontal disease allows for increased release of potentially harmful bacteria into the bloodstream, which, in turn, triggers the liver to produce C-reactive proteins. High levels of these proteins have been linked to the inflammatory response common in cardiovascular disease. That’s enough evidence to make me floss every day.

What You Can Do

Although researchers have fallen shy of proving that gum disease causes heart disease, they have shown a definitive correlation between poor oral health and poor overall health. Now that you know this, what can you do to make sure your oral health isn’t negatively affecting the rest of your body?

The American Dental Association recommends the following:

- Brush your teeth twice a day
- Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months – sooner if bristles are frayed
- Floss daily
- Eat a balanced diet
- Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and exams
- If you already have gum disease or gingivitis, take care of it; it can be reversed with proper treatment and care

So, will flossing each day keep the doctor away? Maybe and maybe not. But practicing good oral hygiene can go a long way toward keeping you healthy—and toward protecting your smile.