

Is Your Mouth Making You Sick?

How about your baby, child, spouse, or parent? At every phase of life, what's going on with your teeth, gums, jaw muscles, and throat can negatively affect you in surprising ways. Comfort, quality of life, general health, even length of life can be significantly affected.

This article will touch on many of the subjects I will be speaking about in more detail on at the April 10 Healthy Woman luncheon. Please see their website at www.smmccares.com if you would like to register to attend. This article raises a lot of questions. Come to the luncheon for the answers and solutions!

Did you know that....?

Gum disease is a risk factor for premature birth and low birth weight babies.

Tooth decay (actually the bacteria that cause it) is contagious. The children are usually infected by their mother in their early years.

Tooth decay is the most common childhood disease, causing much pain and expense.

Severe tooth decay in toddlers is rampant and causes over 500 operating room cases a year at Scenic Mountain alone to repair the devastation.

In young children, narrow upper jaw shape, can affect face development, cause snoring and even sleep apnea. Sleep apnea in kids often results in bed wetting, restricted body growth, nightmares, and even learning disabilities.

In teenagers, not all wisdom teeth are bad. Some wisdom teeth, and occasionally other unerupted (not yet in the mouth) teeth, can produce pain, swelling, infection or even cysts. Certain of these cysts can cause major damage to the jaw bone or adjacent teeth, and a few can become cancerous.

In older teens and adults, many common migraine and tension headaches are either caused or worsened by clenching of the teeth while sleeping, and to a lesser extent while awake. These are often easily prevented with an FDA approved, effective dental device.

In the same group, TMJ (jaw joint or muscle) pain is almost exclusively caused by nighttime, and to a lesser extent daytime, grinding and clenching of the teeth. Symptoms are normally reduced fairly easily with conservative treatment.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea in adults can cause snoring, high blood pressure, headaches, insomnia, gastric reflux, depression, poor concentration, daytime sleepiness, impotence or lack of sex drive, and premature death. Oral appliances, which position to lower jaw

forward to open the airway, are often extremely effective in reducing snoring and sleep apnea and are better tolerated than CPAP.

Oral cancer kills more each year than skin or cervical cancer. Even those who survive are usually severely disfigured. Risk factors include smoking, drinking, and orally acquired genital human papilloma virus (HPV).

Gum disease is the most common cause of chronic bad breath. It is usually easily treated in its early stages. Signs are red, puffy, or bleeding gums.

Severe gum disease destroys the bone around the teeth is the most common cause of tooth loss leading to dentures.

Dentures, while they can look good, and are better for chewing than no teeth, are poor substitutes for real teeth. People with dentures eat softer, more fattening, less healthy foods causing them to have poorer nutrition while being more overweight.

Severe gum disease, like tooth decay, can be contagious.

Severe gum disease makes blood sugar control more difficult in diabetics and diabetics are more likely to have gum disease.

Severe gum disease has been associated with higher rates of heart disease, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease. It does not cause these problems, but it may make them more likely.

That's an overview of the connection between your mouth and the rest of your body. Come on out to the luncheon and get the details!

Dr. David Ward practices comprehensive family dentistry in Big Spring. These subjects are also covered in more detail in previous Herald articles posted on his website at www.davidwarddds.com.