



## **DID YOU KNOW?**

### **Oral Health and General Health**

**Did you know** that recent studies have established a definite link between your oral health and your general health? Keeping your teeth and gums in tip-top condition is a simple, yet important way to maintain good overall health.

#### **How Does Oral Health Affect General Health?**

Periodontal or gum disease is caused by a bacterial infection that attacks gums, ligaments and bone. These infections can eventually enter the blood stream and travel to major organs and begin *new* infections. Periodontal disease has also been associated with a variety of conditions with systemic implications, such as diabetes and osteoporosis.

Several studies have shown a link between poor oral health and heart disease. In fact, at least one study concluded that patients with severe gum disease double their risk of a fatal heart attack. Bacteria found in periodontal disease can also lead to blood clots, increasing the risk for heart attacks or stroke.

The association between diabetes and periodontal disease has been well documented. As diabetic patients have a compromised ability to respond to infections, they are at greater risk for periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease has also been linked to preterm and low birth weight babies. Additionally, elevated levels of hormones in expectant mothers may cause the gums to react differently to the bacteria found in plaque, increasing susceptibility to gum inflammation and disease during pregnancy.

**What Needs To Be Done?** In 2006, only 61% of Texans reported having visited the dentist in the past year. The Department of State Health Services' Oral Health Program must raise awareness among the general public, health care providers, and elected officials about the connection between oral health and general health. There are simple things individuals can do to ensure good oral health including practicing good oral hygiene by brushing their teeth, flossing, and seeing a dentist twice a year.

Many Texans do not have access to dental care. The federal government has designated 31 percent of Texas counties as "dental health professional shortage areas." Even where there are enough dentists, many Texans simply cannot afford the visit. Another way to improve oral health and reduce dental infections is increasing access to fluoridated water systems, fluoridation reduces tooth decay. Approximately 24 percent of Texans live in areas *without* fluoridated water.

**What Are We Doing In Texas To Improve Oral Health?** The Oral Health Program provides preventive dental services for low-income children, promotes community water fluoridation and monitors the dental health of Texans in an effort to keep lawmakers informed.

#### **WHERE TO LEARN MORE**

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