

## Kissing Gum Disease

According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, 80% of U.S. adults suffer from gum disease. In other words, eight out of ten adults are affected by a disease that is largely preventable and can contribute to them having heart attacks and strokes.

Blah, blah, blah. We hear it over and over. Let's make it real.

Over the holidays, you probably kissed a dozen extended family members. Some on the cheek, others on the lips. Of those twelve, nine or ten of them had a combination of bloody gums, loose infected teeth, bad breath, pus pockets, and mineral build up on their teeth. Chances are good that one of those was you.

Gum disease, or periodontitis, is a chronic, inflammatory condition. Huh?

Bacteria live in your mouth and eat what you eat. If left alone (not brushed or flossed or professionally removed), these bacteria build up colonies on and between your teeth. If these bacterial cities expand below the gums, they eventually cause a chain reaction in your body to fight them off. This chain reaction is inflammation. Almost daily, new research reveals the negative effects of inflammation on overall health. We currently believe that the long term effects of gum disease can contribute to other more serious problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and even dementia and Alzheimer's. In other words, any inflammation in the body is bad and needs to be addressed...as soon as possible.

Doc, I don't want a stroke or Alzheimer's or diabetes, what can I do?

First, the severity of gum disease must be diagnosed. This is done through a combination of routine dental x-rays, gum measurements, and a thorough examination. There are even tests that can measure the amount of bacteria in your spit. After a diagnosis, the disease is treated by removing the bacteria and build up that cause the inflammation. This is done with a combination of deep, thorough dental cleanings, antibiotics, improved home care, and sometimes gum surgery.

And then it's all cured, right?

Unfortunately, we have yet to come up with a definitive cure for gum disease. We can fight it and stop it, but we cannot make it go away forever. The mix of bacteria that cause the problem can only be controlled, not eradicated. This means that routine preventative visits are a must after getting your gums treated. If follow up care is ignored and old, bad flossing habits return, so will the build up and disease.

It has been said that the mouth is a window to one's overall health. In many cases this proves to be true. Hopefully, one of those nine relatives with gum disease will not be you.

Until next week, keep smiling.

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