

## Parish Nurse Note

# October-Dental

*"The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Jeremiah 31:29 NIV*

We all want to prevent heart disease. The usual recommendations for prevention of cardiovascular disease are to lose weight if overweight, eat a healthy variety of foods, exercise regularly, and don't smoke. There is one more that may surprise you. Research shows a correlation between gum disease and heart disease because infection can travel from the mouth to the heart muscle. Who would have thought that brushing your teeth and flossing regularly might help prevent heart disease?



Some people are genetically more prone to gum disease, but everyone can be vigilant in keeping their mouths healthy. Healthy gums are pink, firm and elastic. Conditions of the mouth that may be related to heart disease include:

- **Gingivitis:** bacteria builds up around gaps between gums and teeth and causes mild symptoms of redness, swelling and sometimes bleeding.
- **Periodontitis:** advanced gum disease where infection goes deeper. Toxins from bacteria are released that cause pockets to form between teeth and gums. Eventually this can cause damage to the bone that supports teeth. Gums recede from the teeth and bleeding is common.
- **Cavities, abscesses, missing teeth:** mouth problems that can lead to inflammation and possible heart disease.

Some medications can cause dry mouth that can lead to gum disease. Illnesses like diabetes or arthritis can also affect the immune system causing gum problems. These need to be discussed with the doctor and dentist to find a solution.

Prevention is the key. Brush your teeth twice a day and floss at least once a day. Brushing should be in a circular motion. Back and forth brushing can actually cause damage to the gums. Flossing also needs to be done properly to be effective. At your next visit check with the hygienist or dentist to be sure that your technique is correct. Visits for cleaning and checkups should be at least every six months. Anyone with existing gum problems will need more frequent cleanings. Caring for your teeth and gums takes little time when you consider the benefit it may give your heart.

*(Source: MedlinePlus, [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov))*

