

7 Things your Mouth can Reveal about Your Periodontal Health



#1: Bleeding Gums = Hormonal Imbalance

You may not be aware but hormone receptors are embedded in our gum tissue. During pregnancy, women may experience bleeding gums, not because of a problem with a tooth, but because their hormone levels have changed. Ditto for menopause. Women also tend to have more sensitive gums during their menstrual cycle. It is important to be more thorough with your dental care during your period.

#2: Red Mouth, Fat Tongue = Nutritional Deficiency

If the corners of one's mouth are red, that can be a sign of a vitamin B6 deficiency. A swollen, shiny, red or beefy tongue could all be signs of an iron deficiency. Similarly, a pale tongue can indicate anemia. Bring any color questions to the attention of Dr. Novack for further evaluation.

#3: Cracked, Crumbling Teeth = GERD

Often patients tend to assume their teeth are wearing down because of grinding. When dentists observe teeth that appear melted away with lots of cracks, it's often the result of stomach acid emitted during sleep. Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease or GERD describes a condition where stomach acids come up through the esophagus into the mouth. "The hard structures of teeth are being bathed in acid and low pH and that is actually eroding the enamel off the teeth," says Jeanette Kern, DDS, who practices general dentistry in Monterey, Calif. "These teeth have a very specific look - it's like when you go to the seashore and see rocks smoothed out by wear. People who grind have more flattened and sharp regions." Dr. Novack routinely evaluates our patients and when appropriate, makes a referral to a gastroenterologist should he diagnose tooth wear consistent with GERD.

#4: Bad Breath = Stomach Issues

If you're brushing and flossing regularly and have favorable periodontal-dental checkups, bad breath could be related to stomach issues. "A small bacterial overgrowth in a patient's stomach can show up as bad breath and not be associated at all with teeth," says Sanda Moldovan, DDS, MS, CNS, a Beverly Hills periodontist. Bad breath may at times be an indication of liver or kidney problems. Diabetics may have breath that smells musty like fermentation. This indicates a lack of diabetic control and a need to see their diabetologist. Bad breath not related to oral health **must** be checked out.

#5: Flat, Worn Teeth & Headaches = Stress

Flat worn teeth or headaches upon rising typically suggest night time teeth grinding. If you sleep solo, bruxism can go unnoticed until your dentist examines your mouth. Morning head-aches and jaw pain are other tell-tale signs. "Worn teeth are just the beginning - grinding affects the entire masticatory apparatus - from the bones that surround the teeth to the muscles that move the jaw," says Bryon Viechnicki, DMD, MS, an orthodontist in Bethlehem, Pa., and clinical adjunct associate professor of orthodontics at Temple University. Teeth can develop stress fractures and grinders can have muscle pain and headaches that feel sinus-related. "In many men, bruxism is a real pain in the neck - the cervical muscles can be affected," says Viechnicki. In women, migraines associated with bruxism are common. The scariest part of severe bruxism for many patients is not being able open their mouth all

the way. To protect your teeth, jaws and muscles, a custom mouth guard can be made. Managing stress and anxiety can also help relieve symptoms.

#6: Canker Sores = Gluten Intolerance

Canker sores may be an indication of gluten intolerance or a mineral deficiency such as zinc. "Normally if I see someone with canker sores, I will give them a zinc supplement and if they still have them, I would send them to the gastro doc to check out their gluten intolerance, for possible celiac disease," says Moldovan. Celiac disease is an inherited, immunological disorder in which the proteins found in wheat, rye and barley cause damage to the lining of the small intestine. A recent study suggests a link between mouth sores and an intolerance for gluten. Study participants who ate a gluten-free diet saw their canker sores heal. Don't hesitate to inquire further should you suffer from repeated canker sores.

#7: Gum Disease & Inflammation = Heart Problems

"We know that the type of the bacteria in the mouth can be transferred into our blood vessels. This causes atherosclerotic plaque to form with the same bacterial composition. "So bacteria circulate in our entire body," says Kern. Even if you only have mild periodontal disease, bacteria can enter your blood stream and attack your immune system. "I think it's the combination that it is wearing down our immune system along with type of bacteria in the plumbing of the blood vessels that can cause coronary problems," Kern explains. Periodontal Supportive Maintenance reduces oral bacteria thus lowering the inflammatory process throughout the body. "So you may think you are cleaning up your mouth, but you're possibly saving your life when you take care of your periodontal disease," says Kern.

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