

Did you know?



SADA
THE SOUTH AFRICAN
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

Your mouth reflects your overall health

The Mouth–Body Connection

Did you know that your oral health offers a glimpse into your overall wellbeing? The mouth is a vital part of the body's ecosystem - not separate from it. Dentists often refer to it as the "window to the body" because many general health conditions first show subtle signs in the mouth.

Problems such as bleeding gums, mouth ulcers, persistent bad breath, or dry mouth may not always be caused by oral issues alone. They can sometimes be early indicators of underlying conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune disorders, and even nutritional deficiencies. Recognizing these warning signs early allows for timely medical attention and better long-term outcomes.

How Oral Bacteria Affect the Body

The mouth contains hundreds of types of bacteria - most are harmless, but when oral hygiene is poor, harmful bacteria can multiply and cause infection. This leads to gum disease (periodontitis), which is an inflammatory condition that can damage the tissues supporting your teeth.

If left untreated, these bacteria and inflammatory chemicals can enter the bloodstream and travel to other parts of the body. Research has linked chronic gum disease to serious health problems such as:

- **Cardiovascular disease**, by contributing to inflammation and narrowing of blood vessels.
- **Diabetes**, as inflammation can make blood sugar more difficult to control.
- **Respiratory infections**, when bacteria from the mouth are inhaled into the lungs.
- **Pregnancy complications**, including premature birth or low birth weight.

Good oral hygiene i.e. brushing twice daily, flossing, and regular dental cleanings reduce harmful bacteria and supports overall systemic health.

Your Dentist: A Partner in Preventive Health

Dentists do more than care for teeth - they play a crucial role in identifying early signs of broader health issues. During a routine dental check-up, your dentist examines not only your teeth and gums but also your tongue, cheeks, jaw, and soft tissues for abnormalities that could indicate infection, nutritional deficiencies, or even early signs of oral cancer.

Regular dental visits also give you the opportunity to discuss any changes in your health or medication, both of which can impact your mouth. Certain medications, for example, may cause dry mouth or gum swelling - conditions that your dentist can help you manage.

A Healthy Mouth, a Healthier You

Maintaining a healthy mouth is one of the simplest ways to protect your overall wellbeing. Brushing and flossing daily, eating a balanced diet, staying hydrated, and avoiding tobacco all contribute to a stronger body and a healthier smile.

Think of your mouth as part of your body's early warning system - when something is wrong, it is sending you a sign. By paying attention to your oral health and visiting your dentist regularly, you take an important step toward a healthier, longer life.

Learn more about the link between oral and general health on the SADA website at www.sada.co.za and [find a registered dentist near you](#).

Information supplied by The South African Dental Association

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