

Better Oral Hygiene Can Prevent Dementia or Alzheimer's Disease

Taking good care of your teeth and gums is advisable for many reasons. If you don't, you could become the victim of a number of ailments including dental caries, periodontitis, gingivitis, cleft palate and even oral cancer.

Neglecting your oral health even puts you at risk of contracting more serious lifestyle diseases like diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer and heart disease. The erectile dysfunction some men suffer and the pregnancy complications some mothers experience are said to be attributable to poor dental hygiene.

Recent studies have shown poor oral hygiene can increase your chances of developing dementia or Alzheimer's Disease later in life. Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is a neuro-degenerative disease that is mostly seen in people above the age of eighty, though some may begin to show symptoms earlier.

Oral health and Alzheimer's

A [study conducted by the University of Bergen's Department of Science](#) (1) established a DNA-based link between gingivitis and the chances of a person developing Alzheimer's Disease. According to Piotr Mydel, one of the researchers, there is evidence that the bacteria responsible for this gum disease can find its way up into the brain. Though the bacteria itself does not directly trigger Alzheimer's, it produces a protein that accelerates the progression of the disease.

The protein achieves this by secreting an enzyme that destroys nerve cells in the part of the brain responsible for memory. Piotr and his team observed this trend in the majority of the 53 Alzheimer's patients they studied. The harmful enzyme, aptly named gingipains, was found in 96 percent of them.

Left untreated, gingivitis can lead to periodontitis (though this is not always the case). Plaque build-up in the gums leads to spaces developing between the teeth and gums. Due to this one may notice that they easily bleed whenever they're brushing.

As the disease worsens, the pockets between the gum and teeth widen and digestive enzymes and toxins released by the plaque begin to eat away at both the teeth and gums. This could lead to tooth loss. Worse still, the plaque is thought to release microorganisms that move to the brain and contribute to the progression of AD. This is one of two ways [periodontitis is thought to exacerbate Alzheimer's](#) (3).

[Studies](#) (4) have shown that loss of teeth leads to reduced mastication, which has been found to contribute to loss of spatial memory as well as a reduction of activity in the hippocampus, the brain's memory hub. This was evidenced by a drop in the number of neurons and neuronal activity in the hippocampus.

Maintaining good oral health; what you need to do

Brush your teeth: Cleaning your teeth at least twice a day will keep the bacteria responsible for gingivitis, at bay. Regular brushing keeps plaque from forming on your teeth, hardening, and moving down into your gums. You are also encouraged to floss daily to keep plaque from building up between your teeth.

Regular dental checkups: One of the benefits of regular checkups is that the onset of dental diseases can be identified early and treated. A dental hygienist will be able to diagnose and treat gum disease before it sends harmful enzymes to the brain. Or before it leads to periodontitis. This will be in the course of conducting a thorough assessment of the state of your teeth, gums and the soft tissue in your mouth.

Good dental hygienists will even look into your lifestyle and see how, for instance, your sleep patterns can be affected by a dental condition. They will also perform a thorough cleaning of your teeth and guide you on how to keep your teeth and gums healthy.

References:

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