

Summary: February, 2008

The Importance of Oral Health

Presented by Scott A. Jackson, DMD, FAGD
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Dr. Jackson was excited about presenting this program to the North Central Post Polio Support Group because he had two relatives, an uncle on one side of his family and an aunt on another who both had polio. His uncle died of a heart condition at the age of 69, and although there is no proof that poor dental health contributed to his uncle's death, his uncle never went to a dentist.

Dr. Jackson became interested in dentistry when at the age of 13, he visited a relative in Italy. He was raised in Hialeah, Florida and is a graduate of the University of Florida where he majored in microbiology and he also graduated from their School of Dentistry. He just received his fellowship from the Academy of General Dentistry and is going for his mastership. He was in the navy and served in Dessert Storm. He is familiar with the problems people with PPS have when going to a dentist, including breathing and anesthesia.

Dr. Jackson spoke with us in regard to how our oral health can affect our over-all general health. He showed us pictures of tooth decay or "dental caries" and gum disease including Gingivitis and Periodontitis.

He read from a quote by Hypocrites from over a thousand years ago that stated "Infections diseases can cause inflammatory diseases in different sites."

In the 1920s through the 1940s there was an idea called the Focal Infection Theory that dealt with people who had root canals, and had an abscess on a tooth, that it was encased in the bone and once it got out of the bone it traveled to different sites of the body.

Cavities or dental caries are caused by sugar combined with bacteria on your teeth which come together to cause decay. In the near future, there will be a product on the market being developed by a professor at the University of Florida that will produce a bacteria that will eliminate this bad bacteria from forming and will, in effect, eliminate tooth decay. Meanwhile, if you can follow a totally sugar-free diet, you will not get tooth decay.

Gingivitis is caused by plaque left on teeth from not brushing properly and not flossing or going for regular tooth cleaning. This causes a redness and swelling of the gums. Things that contribute to the formation of gum disease include diabetes, smoking, aging, genetics, stress, pregnancy and medications. When gum disease gets to the point of periodontitis, it can't be controlled through regular dental care, it destroys tissue and bone.

Periodontitis is believed to contribute to the cause of heart disease, diabetes, oral cancer and Alzheimer's disease. There have been autopsies performed where the same infection found in the heart was found to be present in the mouths of the deceased. There is a book available that discusses this called "The Mouth Body Connection."

Dr. Jackson also discussed medication that is used for osteoporosis that can cause bisphosphonate associated osteo-necrosis of the jaw, or bone death. This is very rare and the cases that have been documented were mainly affected by Zometa and Aredia, which are taken intravenously. However, in rare cases, medications taken orally such as Fosamax, Actonel and Boniva can have this effect on jaw bones. Discuss this with your doctor if you are concerned about this rare side effect.

If diabetes is not kept under control, it can become worse through the development of gum disease, as can respiratory diseases. Bacteria can be inhaled and even transferred through kissing. You can even get pneumonia through contracting bacteria from gum disease. It is even believed that this bacteria from your mouth can directly infect blood vessel walls and form plaque that can lead to stroke and heart disease.

If you don't have teeth, you can still develop fungal infections, so oral health is important to everyone. To help prevent tooth decay and diseases of the mouth and gums, brush your teeth regularly and use dental floss. Visit your dentist at least twice yearly to have your teeth professionally cleaned. It may protect you against other more serious diseases that can develop throughout your body, and it certainly improves your smile!

Summarized by Sharon Daszczyński