

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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Thoughts from Dr. Amy

Oral Health: An Important Element To Cardiovascular Wellness

As you may have heard, the American Heart Association recently released its 2023 update, which includes Life's Essential 8, a guide aimed at enhancing cardiovascular wellness for all Americans. The guide recognizes key lifestyle variables that decrease the risk of heart disease, including maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, excellent sleep and not smoking. However, the AHA appears to have missed a crucial element that we at the Prevention Center have focused on for decades — periodontal disease and oral health.

Periodontal disease is an inflammation of the gums caused by bacterial growth. Consistent research has suggested that periodontal disease is a significant risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and we know that individuals with periodontal disease are more prone to heart attacks and strokes.

The connection between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease is nuanced but is likely driven by inflammation and oral pathogens. The inflammation



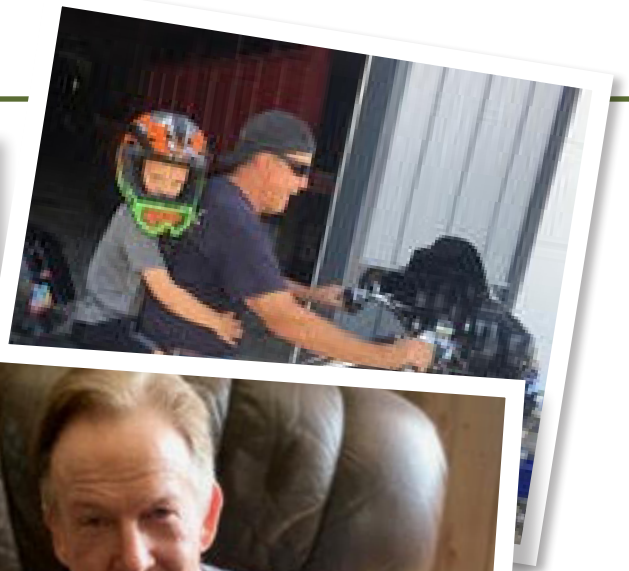
Diagram courtesy American Heart Association.

caused by periodontal disease also causes systemic inflammation, which increases the risk of arterial and heart disease.

While the AHA does acknowledge the importance of dental health, its new Life's Essential 8 does not specifically place any focus on periodontal disease as a cardiovascular risk factor, making the guide incomplete. The guide could benefit from elaborating on the relationship between oral health and cardiovascular

disease, which would then emphasize the vital role of dentists as part of a collaborative preventative healthcare team.

At the Prevention Center, we have great respect for our dental colleagues and the importance of oral health. Because of this, we are now not only recommending oral pathogen testing, but also offering it in the office for any patient who has not had the opportunity to complete testing with his or her dentist.



An Interview with Tracy Thorpe

by Rick Merizon

Tracy Thorpe has been on an incredible journey over the past several years. For me, it is an honor to have met him and to be able to tell his story.

Living in Centerburg, Ohio, 63-year-old Tracy has been retired from the elevator trade and is now actively farming soy beans with his son and son-in-law. He is married with three grown kids and six grandkids (Photo 1) with whom he loves spending his free time.

In 2018, Tracy's local dentist started deep cleaning every six months because of dental problems despite not suffering any pain or discomfort. The cleanings became quite painful, so he started more basic cleanings every three months. During the increased frequency of dental cleanings, Tracy said no antibiotics were used to help stem this potential infection.

In mid-September 2019 Tracy's journey took a very unexpected turn. He awoke to swollen hands and knees. After visiting his local doctor, he was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). RA is an autoimmune disease that most often attacks the joints and is associated with severe systemic inflammation. He immediately began taking Methotrexate and a cocktail of other anti-inflammatory drugs. By spring 2020, Tracy's symptoms had not improved, so he asked his doctor to change medications. Despite limited improvement, Tracy's kids were adamant that he seek alternative treatment methods due to his chronic pain and degraded mobility. Through this encouragement he discovered biofeedback, a painless technique that evaluates and measures various bodily functions. As a result of the biofeedback session, he learned that he

had an undiagnosed dental infection.

Prior to September 2019, Tracy enjoyed playing with his grandkids, riding his beloved Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and spending long days toiling on his farm. However, since his RA diagnosis, Tracy had lost much of his former freedom. Having lost 45 pounds, he was struggling to use a walker for mobility and spent most of his days either in bed or in transport to appointments with the many doctors attempting to manage his debilitating pain.

After discovery of the dental infection, Tracy found the BaleDoneen Method dental provider Dr. Barbara McClatchie in Worthington, Ohio.

The BDM offers insight into many of the root causes of systemic inflammation, including periodontic and endodontic disease, a specialty of Dr. McClatchie. Upon visiting Dr. McClatchie, Tracy completed a simple salivary diagnostic test that revealed very aggressive periodontal disease. He also had a dental Cone Beam CT scan that determined he had severe endodontic infection in five of his teeth, giving insight into a significant source of systemic inflammation. As a result, Dr. McClatchie immediately initiated a four-hour

periodontal therapy followed by 10 days of systemic antibiotics, oral care probiotics and prescription trays. Within 48 hours, Tracy began to notice a rapid decrease in his overall pain and RA symptoms. Over the following two years, Tracy's inflammatory markers were controlled and his RA symptoms abated significantly.

Following the successful treatment of his periodontal disease and RA, Tracy was referred to BDM medical provider Dr. Eric Goulder of the Heart Attack and Stroke Prevention Center of Central Ohio, also in Worthington. Dr. Goulder administered a genetic panel, a sleep test, and a cMPT, a 15-20 minute painless ultrasound of the carotid artery in the neck. This test is very strongly correlated with the plaque burden throughout the body. These tests are performed as part of the normal BDM patient screening. Tracy learned that he had several genetic predispositions to cardiovascular disease (CVD), sleep apnea, and was carrying a plaque burden detected in his carotid arteries, all related to his significant systemic inflammation.

The BDM has pioneered the link and the risks between periodontal disease and CVD by inflammation, which is why Drs. McClatchie and Goulder have worked together for the benefit of their patients.

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This simple recipe is a delicious way to enjoy the bounty of spring veggies and herbs, while getting excellent sources of plant-based protein from chickpeas and quinoa. The olive oil provides healthy fat and polyphenols, while the mint, cucumber, peas, and radishes burst with spring flavors. New research from the American Gut Project on diet and the gut microbiome suggests that aiming to eat 30 unique plants each week can significantly improve gut dysbiosis, which we know can contribute to oxidative stress and inflammation. So whip up this easy salad and know you are eating eight plants in one beautiful bowl!

INGREDIENTS

3 cups cooked quinoa
 3 chopped persian cucumbers
 1 cup coarsely chopped snap peas
 ½ cup chopped parsley
 ¼ cup chopped mint
 ¼ cup chopped red onion
 3-5 small radishes, thinly sliced
 1 15-oz. can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
 ½ cup shelled pistachios
 Juice of 1 large lemon
 ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
 Salt and pepper to taste (optional)
 ¼ cup crumbled feta cheese



DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix all ingredients except olive oil, lemon, salt and pepper, pistachios, and feta together in large salad bowl.
2. In small bowl or mason jar, combine olive oil, lemon, salt and pepper if using. Stir or shake well to combine.
3. Add lemon mixture to quinoa mixture, toss very well to combine.
4. Top with crumbled feta and pistachios.

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Tracy began watching his overall diet very closely and adopted a largely sugar-free diet, focused on increased fiber and vegetables. Due to his genetic panel, Dr. Goulder put Tracy on a gluten-free diet. He also meditates daily, is seeking acupuncture weekly and has begun taking several herbal supplements.

Since he began his oral treatment with Dr. McClatchie, Tracy has regained 25 pounds and is back to 85% of his former mobility and freedom. He now has enough strength to get back out on his motorcycle and take long rides around Ohio. Best of all, he's able to get down on the ground and play with his grandkids. After being treated by Dr. McClatchie, Tracy now attributes his RA

diagnosis to his original frequent dental cleanings without proper precautions, which may have made his mouth more susceptible to infection and thus, systemic inflammation.

Prior to meeting Dr. McClatchie and Dr. Goulder, Tracy feared he was doomed to a life of chronic, debilitating pain or worse. However, he is now one of the most outspoken advocates for engagements in one's own healthcare and wellness. Tracy told me, "I wish this world was filled with more doctors like Dr. McClatchie." He told me that she takes the time to get to know her patients and spends considerably more time with each patient than most do in our current healthcare regime. Tracy told me he wants everyone to learn about the bene-

fits of the BDM, as it addresses the root cause of disease, instead of just prescribing "more pills." He feels more in control and actively engaged with his own health and wellness than ever before.

Tracy's parting words to me were a request to help tell his story and plead with everyone who will listen to seek out alternative answers if they don't feel they're getting what they need from their current healthcare providers. He strongly believes that a simple 20-second saliva test saved his life and restored his autonomy. He warned that people need to understand and control the sources of inflammation in their bodies that are causing RA, CVD, lupus, and many more ailments. He pleaded, "This should be the standard of care in our country and the world."



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