

Heart TALK

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

Vol 53 October 2017

Thoughts from
Dr. Amy



4 SCARY REASONS TO TAKE YOUR DENTAL HEALTH SERIOUSLY



October is National Dental Hygiene Month, which honors the work of a potentially lifesaving member of your heart-attack-and-stroke prevention team: your dental provider. Recent research links poor oral health to increased risk for many deadly disorders, including Alzheimer's disease, cancer and cardiovascular disease (CVD), the leading killer of Americans.

Conversely, people who take excellent care of their teeth and gums and get regular dental care live longer, compared to those who neglect their oral health, according to a large study of older adults. That is a great reason to schedule a dental checkup and brush up on the best ways to optimize your oral health. Use these BaleDoneen Method recommendations to safeguard your smile — and your arterial health.

Get Checked for Gum Disease

Periodontal disease (PD) affects the majority of U.S. adults over age 30, many of whom don't know they have a serious oral infection that can lead to tooth loss, if untreated. Also known as gum disease, PD often has no obvious symptoms in the early stages. Warning signs include red, swollen or tender gums, bleeding while brushing or flossing, receding gums, loose or sensitive teeth and persistent bad breath.

To find out if you have gum disease, ask your dental provider to do a painless exam, using a mirror and periodontal probe to check for signs of oral infection. If you have PD, treatments include deep cleaning, a daily program of oral care to follow at home, prescription mouthwashes, dental trays with antibacterial gel, and in some cases, a short course of oral antibiotics. Early diagnosis and optimal dental care are crucial if you have PD, which has recently been linked to the following health threats:

Heart attacks and strokes

People with periodontitis are more than twice as likely to suffer heart attacks — and have up to triple the risk for stroke — compared to those with healthy gums. A [landmark peer-reviewed BaleDoneen study](#) explains why. The research, published in *Postgraduate Medical Journal (PMJ)*, was the first to identify PD due to high-risk oral bacteria as a contributing cause of arterial disease (plaque). These bacterial villains often enter the bloodstream and inflame plaque in the arteries, leading to blood clots that can trigger heart attacks and strokes.

Alzheimer's disease

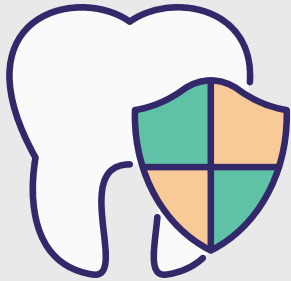
Having chronic gum inflammation (periodontitis) for ten or more years is associated with a 70% higher risk for developing Alzheimer's disease, according to [a new study of patients ages 50 or older](#) with gum disease. "Our findings support the notion that infectious diseases associated with low-grade inflammation, such as chronic periodontitis, may play a substantial role in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease," the study team concluded.

Cancer

Women with gum disease have triple the risk for esophageal cancer and to a lesser extent, increased risk for breast, lung, gallbladder and melanoma skin cancer, compared those without PD, even if they don't smoke, researchers reported in August. The [study](#) included 65,869 postmenopausal women ages 54 to 86 whose health was tracked for up to 15 years. The researchers theorize that cancer-causing pathogens in the mouth may spread to other parts of the body through the blood and/or swallowed saliva.

Diabetes

People with diabetes have higher rates of PD than non-diabetics, with those who don't have their blood sugar under control being at especially high risk. That's probably because people with diabetes are more vulnerable to infections, but the relationship between PD and diabetes goes both ways. Severe PD can increase blood sugar, which in turn puts people with diabetes at increased risk for other complications of their disease, the [American Academy of Periodontology](#) reports.



WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR ORAL HEALTH?

If you use nicotine in any form, here's even more motivation to snuff out the habit: It's a leading risk for developing gum disease. We also advise these measures to optimize your oral health:



BRUSH AND FLOSS TWICE A DAY

Although you may have seen headlines claiming that there's not much science to support flossing, [in a nine-year study of 5,611 older adults](#), people who never flossed had a 30% higher death rate than those who flossed daily.



GO TO BED WITH A CLEAN MOUTH

The study found that never brushing at night raised mortality risk by 25%, versus nightly brushing. Since your mouth produces less saliva to wash your teeth and gums when you're sleeping, it's particularly crucial to floss and brush thoroughly before bed. We recommend using a sonic toothbrush for the best results.



GET A DENTAL CLEANING EVERY 3 MONTHS, OR AS ADVISED BY YOUR DENTAL PROVIDER

The study also found that people who hadn't gone to a dentist in the previous year had a 50% higher death rate than those who went two or more times annually, leading the researchers to conclude that good oral health promotes longevity by helping people avoid lethal systemic diseases sparked by infections and chronic inflammation, such as CVD.



SHARE OUR PMJ STUDY WITH YOUR DENTIST AND HYGIENIST

Because this science is so new, your dental provider may not be aware of it. Download or read the study online at www.pmj.bmj.com/content/93/1098/215?etoc. Use it to encourage him or her to join your heart-attack-and-stroke prevention team!

October Recipe

Savory Pumpkin Turkey Chili



Rich in nutrients and low in calories, pumpkin has a wide range of benefits for cardiovascular health. It's high in potassium, which has beneficial effects on blood pressure, and it's also an excellent source of beta-carotene, a powerful antioxidant that has been linked to reduced risk for heart disease. What's more, the tasty orange fruit is packed with fiber, which aids weight loss and may help improve blood sugar levels, research suggests.

Here's an easy way to enjoy autumn's signature squash, with a delicious one-pan recipe that's ready in just 30 minutes. For a spicier version, add hot sauce to taste.

INGREDIENTS

- Cooking spray
- 1 pound ground turkey
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 green bell peppers, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 14.5 ounce can of diced tomatoes
- 15 ounce can of pumpkin puree
- 15 ounce can of black beans, drained
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley (for garnish)

Coat a large skillet with cooking spray and sauté turkey over medium heat until browned. Drain juices and add chopped onion, bell pepper and garlic. Cook for five minutes or until onion is translucent. Add tomatoes, pumpkin puree and black beans. Season with chili powder, cumin, pumpkin pie spice and black pepper. Cover skillet and simmer over low heat for 20 minutes. Garnish with chopped parsley and enjoy!

Serves six

Adapted from Sweetpeaskitchen.com and Allrecipes.com.

Get Vaccinated Against Heart Attacks and Strokes TODAY!

If you haven't gotten your annual flu shot, here's some powerful motivation: Adults who are immunized against seasonal influenza have a 46% lower risk for fatal or non-fatal heart attacks, strokes and other major cardiovascular (CV) events over the subsequent 12 months, compared to those who received a placebo shot or no shot, according to a recent Harvard analysis that pooled results from randomized clinical trials involving nearly 7,000 men and women.

Another recent study found that people who get their shot early in the flu season, which begins in October, have an even greater reduction in heart-attack-and-stroke risk than those who wait until mid-November to get immunized. Why is influenza vaccination such a powerful weapon against CV events? Here's a look at the latest research and the facts about flu shots.



Is there any scientific proof linking flu to higher risk for heart attacks and stroke?

Many studies have shown that acute influenza infection is a strong, independent risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. Researchers report that up to 91,000 Americans die each year from CV events triggered by flu. These grim statistics have prompted the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology to issue guidelines recommending flu shots for people with cardiovascular disease (CVD).

How does flu contribute to cardiovascular events?

The likely culprit is inflammation, the immune system's response to infection, in which SWAT teams of white blood cell components are mobilized to battle the invading pathogens. Although this response is normally protective, it can raise heart-attack-and-stroke risk in people with CVD.

To picture how flu could ignite a heart attack or stroke in someone with CVD, think of plaque in the arteries as kindling. Inflammation, which has been shown in recent studies to actually *cause* CVD, lights the match, causing plaque to rupture explosively through the arterial wall. When a plaque rupture tears the blood-vessel lining, the body tries to heal the injury by forming a blood clot. If the clot blocks a coronary artery, it could spark a heart attack, while a clot that travels to the brain could ignite a stroke.

Who should get a flu shot?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

recommends vaccination for everyone, except babies under 6 months of age, but cautions that some patients should check with their medical providers before being immunized, including people with a severe allergy to chicken eggs, those who have had a severe reaction to a flu shot, and people who are ill with a fever (they should wait until they recover before getting vaccinated).

How dangerous is flu?

Since 2010, annual hospitalizations for flu have ranged from 140,000 to 710,000 in the United States, and flu-related deaths have ranged from 12,000 to 56,000, according to the CDC. Sadly, fewer than half of Americans with high-risk conditions like CVD get the shot, leaving themselves dangerously unprotected against both flu complications and CV events.

Do flu shots have any other benefits for vascular health?

Here is yet another compelling reason to head to your local pharmacy or medical provider today to get a flu shot: Doing so reduces risk for a blood clot in your lungs (pulmonary embolism) or legs (deep vein thrombosis). In one study, risk for developing these conditions fell by 26% overall in people who had been vaccinated in the previous year, with a 48% drop in risk for people under age 52.

Are there any other vaccines that reduce heart-attack-and-stroke risk?

The BaleDoneen Method recommends

two additional vaccinations to reduce heart-attack-and-stroke risk if you are 50 or older and have CVD:

- **The herpes zoster vaccination against shingles.** This shot protects against reactivation of the chickenpox virus almost everyone was exposed to during childhood. The virus, which lies dormant in nerve cells, can flare up, typically in older people, and cause a blistering skin rash that can lead to chronic nerve pain. Two large studies report that people who develop shingles are at up to four times higher risk for stroke, highlighting the value of vaccination. While shingles usually targets people who are 60 or older, about 20 percent of cases occur in people ages 50 to 59, which is why we advise being vaccinated at 50 if you have CVD. The CDC recommends the shot for everyone who is 65 or older, and for people who are 19 or older and smoke or have asthma.
- **Vaccination against pneumococcal pneumonia.** If you're 65 or older — or younger with risk factors for pneumonia, such as heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or diabetes — the CDC advises being immunized against pneumococcal pneumonia. A study of more than 84,000 people found that those who had been vaccinated were at lower risk for both heart attack and stroke. Given these benefits, we advise patients with CVD to be vaccinated at 50.