

# GUM DISEASE AND DEMENTIA



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There is an old saying that the mouth is the gateway to the body. Recent research has begun to prove that statement. Because the mouth is a pathway to the body, bacteria that reside in a diseased mouth can easily spread throughout the body through the bloodstream. When you experience gum irritation and bleeding, you essentially have an open wound and bacteria from your mouth can enter the rest of the body through your bloodstream.

Gum disease can have serious consequences including pain, chronic bleeding, and tooth loss. It has also been linked to a number of total body health conditions including heart disease and Alzheimer's. People who have chronic gum disease are at a higher risk for heart attack, according to the Academy of General Dentistry. Gum disease (called gingivitis in its early stages and periodontal disease in the late stages) is caused by plaque buildup. An array of recent research has shown that gum disease may contribute to heart disease because bacteria from infected gums can dislodge, enter the bloodstream, attach to blood vessels and increase clot formation. It has also been suggested that inflammation caused by gum disease may also trigger clot formation. Clots decrease blood flow to the heart, thereby causing an elevation in blood pressure and increasing the risk of a heart attack.

In addition, there is new research now linking periodontal disease and Alzheimer's disease. A recent study of over 5000 retirement community members found that not brushing daily could increase the risk of developing dementia by 65%. Other research supports the correlation between tooth loss and Alzheimer's. In a 2010 study involving 152 people, NYU dental researchers linked inflamed gums to greatly increased risk for cognitive impairment associated with Alzheimer's. The study compared mental function at ages 50 and 70 and found that people with gum inflammation were nine times more likely to score in the lowest category of mental function than those with little or no inflammation.

Byproducts of a gum disease causing bacterium, known as *Porphyromonas gingivalis* (*P. gingivalis*), were found in brain samples of four out of ten Alzheimer's patients, but were not found in any samples from ten healthy people of similar age according to a British study published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*. Future research will involve determining whether the *P. gingivalis* bacteria could be used as a marker for a blood test that predicts the development of Alzheimer's disease in patients who are at higher risk.

This same bacterium, *P. gingivalis*, is commonly found in people with chronic periodontal disease. If the gum disease is not treated properly, the bacteria can enter the bloodstream through such everyday activities as eating and brushing and from there, potentially travel to the brain.

That's scary considering that periodontal disease, a chronic inflammatory disease of the gums and bones supporting the teeth, affects nearly 50 percent of American adults over age 30, and 70 percent of those age 65 or older!

Taking great care of your teeth with regular dental cleanings and having your gum health checked with regular exams along with daily home brushing and flossing may dramatically cut the risks for gum disease and a number of total body health conditions including heart disease and Alzheimer's.

Dr. Steven Davidowitz, DDS, FICOI, is one of the Upper East Side of Manhattan's leading cosmetic dentists in designing and maintaining beautiful smiles, with offices both in Brooklyn and the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Dr. Steven received his DDS degree from the New York University College of Dentistry and received a Fellowship from the International Congress of Oral Implantologists. Dr. Steven is an active member in the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), the American Dental Association (ADA), and the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD).

Dr. Steven has been designated an invisalign Elite Provider, a special designation from Invisalign given to the top 3% of Invisalign providers and hosts local study clubs to spread his knowledge to other dentists on the use of Invisalign.