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Oral Health Center

Stress May Wreak Havoc on Your Mouth

High Stress May Contribute to Gum Disease

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WebMD Medical News

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Aug. 13, 2007 -- Too much stress may not only spoil your mood, it may also spoil your smile.

There is mounting evidence that there's a strong link between stress and gum disease, according to a new review of research on the issue.

Researchers found 57% of recent studies reviewed showed a positive relationship between gum disease and stress and related psychological symptoms like distress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Although it's difficult to pinpoint the negative effects of stress on your gums, researchers say the studies suggest that elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol may be involved.

In addition, stress may make people more lax about their oral health habits.

"Individuals with high stress levels tend to increase their bad habits, which can be harmful to periodontal health. They are less attentive to their oral hygiene and may increase their use of nicotine, alcohol, or drugs," says Preston D. Miller Jr., DDS, president of the American Academy of Periodontology, in a news release. "Patients should seek healthy ways to relieve stress through exercise, balanced eating, plenty of sleep, and maintaining a positive mental attitude."

Stress Harms Gums

Researchers reviewed 14 studies published between 1990 and 2006 on the relationship between stress and gum disease in adults. The results, published in the *Journal of Periodontology*, indicated that most showed a positive relationship between stress and psychological factors and gum disease.

"More research is needed to determine the definitive relationship between stress and periodontal diseases," says researcher Daiane Peruzzo, PhD, of the State University of Campinas, Piracicaba in Brazil, in the news release. "However, patients who minimize stress may be at less risk for periodontal diseases."

If untreated, gum disease can lead to loss of teeth as well as bone in the jaw. [Symptoms of gum disease](#) include tender, bleeding gums, swollen gums, bad breath, and loose teeth.

SOURCES: Peruzzo, D. *Journal of Periodontology*, August 2007; vol 78: pp 1491-1504. News release, American Academy of Periodontology. WebMD Medical Reference from Healthwise: "Gum Disease."

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