



## **Your Dental Health**

### **Could Gum Disease be Killing you???**

**By Dr. Stephen Durham, DMD, FAGD**

Some of the most frustrated patients we treat are ones that are losing their teeth. In today's day and age, people realize, there are no equal substitution for their own healthy real teeth. Most people even detest the idea of wearing removable partials or dentures. Some people however, have resigned themselves to getting dentures because of the dental problems that they have experienced with their natural teeth. Because of these problems, they feel anything is better than their natural teeth, including dentures. This thought is far from the truth. What they do not realize is losing their teeth will adversely affect their health in many ways.

However, edentulism (the loss off all teeth) can shorten one's lifespan by an average of ten years. It also substantially reduces quality of life, self image, and normal daily function. Many years ago, dentures were the easiest way to change ones smile... the original cosmetic dentistry. I doubt anyone in today's high tech world, would now believe edentulism is still the best option for their health and well being.

The most common reason for edentulism at the present time is periodontal disease (gum disease). This is a slowly progressive disease that in most cases causes no pain. Its damage is done over a long period of time. Periodontal disease affects up to 80% of our adult population. Most people are unaware of the problem, which is why damage can be extensive before symptoms force one to seek help. The disease is mainly caused by plaque and tartar, but can be exaggerated by crowded or spaced teeth, tobacco use, poor diet, systemic conditions, ill fitting dental work, and an imbalanced bite.

**Many medical conditions can be made worse by gum disease. Some include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Also noted, is the increased risk of coronary artery disease, heart attack, pneumonia, osteoporosis, stroke, and remature/low birth weight babies.**

Warning signs of periodontal disease include:

- Bleeding gums while brushing or flossing
- Increased space between teeth
- Sensitivity
- Bad breath or taste
- Change in the fit of a partial
- Loose teeth
- Red or swollen gums

Even though prevention is always best, the good news is that periodontal disease can be controlled or arrested. In its earlier stages, it can even be reversed. *Newer techniques can make the treatment of moderate to severe cases of periodontal disease a lot easier and less painful than the solutions of the past. One newer procedure, called LANAP, uses an FDA approved laser to treat the disease. The laser requires no cutting, little down time, and is virtually pain free.* Look for these above listed warning signs, and if you notice any of them please see your dentist.

**Remember, prevention is BEST!** Be on top of your dental health by being checked regularly at least every six months. Floss and brush 2X a day with a toothpaste that carries the ADA seal of acceptance. Eat a healthy diet and avoid tobacco use. Good dental health is a result of good self-care.

Stephen W. Durham DMD, FAGD