

Is there a link between the health of my teeth and my heart?

By Dr. Stephen Durham

You probably already know that your oral health plays a big role in your overall health. However, like many people, you may not be aware of the link between poor oral hygiene and heart disease. One reason is that people with moderate to advanced gum disease have a much higher risk of developing a heart problem than someone whose gums are entirely healthy. This is a problem in itself, but it is even more worrisome that most people with gum disease do not even realize that they have it. According to the American Dental Association, this number is as high as 80 percent.

Your oral health provide clues about your heart health

It might seem hard to believe, but the condition of your teeth and gums can tell both your doctor and dentist that you are at risk of heart disease and other serious health problems. It does make sense, though, once you understand the connection. Every person's mouth contains germs and bacteria that spreads from there to the bloodstream and to other parts of the body. Once these germs and bacteria reach your heart, they can attach themselves to any area already



Dr. Stephen Durham

damaged and produce inflammation. The Mayo Clinic states that inflammation of the heart can lead to a condition called endocarditis, which means an infection has developed in the heart's inner lining. According to the American Heart Association, other possible diseases linked to oral bacteria include stroke and clogged arteries, formally known as atherosclerosis.

Patients who may be at risk

Men and women who already have advanced periodontal disease or chronic conditions of the gums like gingivitis have the highest risk of later developing heart disease. This is especially true when they do not receive a prompt diagnosis for these dental health conditions. Even without one of these oral health conditions, practicing poor oral hygiene increases your risk because plaque accumulates in your mouth and can travel to your bloodstream. This can cause elevated C-reactive protein, a well-known marker for blood vessel inflammation.

Warning signs of gum disease

Not only can you possibly reverse gum disease when caught early, it can also dramatically reduce your risk of heart disease and other complications. Please contact my office for a prompt evaluation if you notice any of these symptoms:

- Some of your teeth feel loose and you have no explanation for it;

- Your gums appear red and/or swollen;
- You feel pain when you touch your gums;
- You have chronic bad breath, despite regular toothbrushing and use of mouthwash;
- You notice blood on your toothbrush or in the sink after spitting when you brush your teeth;
- Your gums look like they are pulling away from your teeth;
- You notice signs of infection around your teeth and gums, such as leaking of pus.

Prevent Gum Disease to Prevent Heart Disease

It is much easier to prevent this problem than to treat it. That starts with brushing and flossing at least twice a day and scheduling preventive care exams twice a year. Your mouth, heart, and entire body will thank you for these efforts.

A recipient of the 2012 Mastership Award from the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), Dr. Stephen Durham is a graduate of Clemson University and the Medical University of South Carolina College of Dental Medicine. Dr. Durham practices at Durham Dental at Town Center in Beaufort. For more information, visit www.DrStephenDurham.com or call 843-379-5400.

HEALTH BRIEFS

Nurse Practitioner joins BM Surgical Specialists

Beaufort Memorial Surgical Specialists has added a new board-certified nurse practitioner to its medical staff. Andrea Hall will be assisting board-certified general surgeons Drs. Perry Burrus, Deanna Mansker, Tim Pearce and Stephen Sisco in the operating room and clinic.



Andrea Hall

A recent graduate of South University, Hall earned her Master of Science in Nursing with a specialization in Adult-Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner. She completed her studies while working as a registered nurse in Beaufort Memorial's OR.

During her tenure at BMH, she has served as the da Vinci Robotic Program coordinator and as unit based council chair on Beaufort Memorial's Nurse Advisory Board.

In her new position at Beaufort Memorial Surgical Specialists, Hall will be evaluating patients before and after surgery, as well as patients referred to the practice from the Emergency Department and hospital floors.

Beaufort Memorial Surgical Specialists is a multiprovider practice offering breast, general, laparoscopic and vascular surgery. Offices are located in both Beaufort and Bluffton. To make an appointment, call 843-524-8171.

Sarah Dyson named BMH Foundation chairperson

Sarah M. Dyson, a longtime member of the Beaufort Memorial Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees, has been named chairman of the nonprofit organization.

One of its longest-serving members, Dyson first joined the board in 2005 and went on to complete nine years of service before stepping down in 2014 at the end of her third term. A year later she was invited to rejoin the board. During her tenure, she has served as secretary and vice chairman of the board and on its investment and trustees committees.

"Sarah understands the benefits a community hospital provides to residents and how the Foundation plays a critical role in helping the hospital meet its funding needs to offer the finest healthcare possible," said Associate Vice President and Chief Development Officer Debbie Schuchmann. "She has a vision for the Foundation and is committed to achieving that vision."

Dyson has been a donor and staunch sup-



Sarah M. Dyson

porter of the hospital since moving to Beaufort in 1996. She has offered her Lady's Island home for a number of Foundation events, including the annual Celebration of Giving, and hosted student musicians performing in the annual Duke Symphony Orchestra fundraising concert. She also has hosted a half-dozen Valentine Ball dinner parties — one of them at the last minute to fill in for a host who became ill.

"I was an Army wife," Dyson quipped. "I learned to be prepared for anything."

Always civically active in the communities where she has lived, Dyson has devoted most of her energies in recent years to helping the YMCA of Beaufort County, Friends of the Beaufort County Library and the Beaufort Memorial Hospital Foundation.

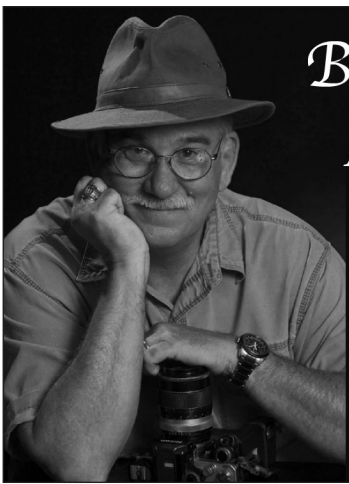
"I became interested in Beaufort Memorial

after seeing the care my in-laws received at the hospital over the years," she said. "That's what people remember — the person who took an extra two minutes to make them feel they're not just a number."

Dyson will serve two years as chairman, tak-

ing the post vacated by Hugh Gouldthorpe.

"I have some tough acts to follow," Dyson said. "But I'm very optimistic this community will continue to rally behind our hospital. Whether you give \$5 or \$5 million, we welcome the support."



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