



Optimal Oral Health

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ORAL HEALTH AND HEART DISEASE

In February 2004, the American Heart Association announced research findings from Finland that evaluated 256 cardiac patients and 250 noncardiac patients with similar demographic characteristics. Researchers found that a poor oral health diagnosis is a strong predictor of heart disease. The principal author, Dr. Sok-Ja Janket of the University School of Dental Medicine and Harvard University School of Public Health, suggests that dentists advise their patients with poor oral health to seek cardiac examinations even if they have no symptoms of heart disease.

Researchers are actively working to develop an understanding of the underlying factors that result in the high correlation between periodontal disease in particular and heart disease. Previous studies have supported the hypothesis that disease-causing bacteria shed from periodontal infections, along with the toxins released by these bacteria, enter the circulatory system and contribute to disease in other parts of the body, such as the heart or brain. Scientists also theorize that the bacteria that cause periodontal disease activate white blood cells in the body to induce systemic immune and inflammatory responses that may contribute to heart disease and stroke.

Ongoing and future studies will focus on identifying the specific biological factors involved and transferring this knowledge to prevent disease. Additional information may be found at: www.americanheart.org.