

The Value of Oral Health: Periodontal Disease Affects Employee Health and Performance



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Bad breath is often associated with careless hygiene or the consumption of spicy foods. But it may also be a sign of periodontal disease – a serious health concern.

Periodontal disease, or gum disease, is caused by bacteria that progressively attack the gums and roots of your teeth. The bacteria form a sticky plaque, which hardens into tartar on the teeth and may irritate and infect the gums. If not regularly removed, tartar can destroy the soft tissue and bone that support your teeth.

Although periodontal disease can destroy oral health, it may also contribute to other serious medical problems, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic kidney disease, and cancer.

Periodontal disease is often labeled an “older persons” disease, but younger individuals are also likely victims, with 33 percent of those over age 30 diagnosed with the disease.

Americans spend \$8 billion to \$12 billion each year just for periodontal care, not to mention medical expenses incurred for related health concerns. (*National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research*)

Consider the following ways periodontal disease is linked to the health of employees:

Pancreatic Cancer. Pancreatic cancer is extremely difficult to treat and little is known about exact causes. Recently medical professionals discovered that individuals with periodontal disease have higher levels of oral bacteria, which may contribute to the development of pancreatic cancer.

Pancreatic cancer is the fourth-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, with more than 30,000 Americans diagnosed each year. Less than 5 percent of individuals with pancreatic cancer survive more than five years. (*National Cancer Institute*)

Rheumatoid Arthritis. More than 1.3 million Americans suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, a chronic inflammatory disease of the joints. Researchers have discovered that individuals with rheumatoid arthritis are eight times more likely to have periodontal disease. (*American Academy of Periodontology*)

Type 2 Diabetes. Americans diagnosed with periodontal disease are twice as likely to become diabetic within 20 years. Health professionals believe periodontal disease alters the metabolic condition

of individuals, contributing to the progression of Type 2 diabetes. (*Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health*)

Gum infections allow bacteria to enter the bloodstream, affecting the body's ability to remove glucose, which is sugar, from the blood. This makes it harder for people to control their diabetes, and may eventually lead to increased vision problems, cardiovascular and kidney disease, and circulation issues that could lead to amputation.

Coronary Issues. Individuals with periodontal disease are at a higher risk for coronary heart disease. Approximately 85 percent of heart attack patients have periodontal disease. (*American Academy of Periodontology*)

There are more than 700 different types of bacteria in the mouth. When bacteria travel from bleeding gums into an open blood vessel, they cling to platelets and may eventually cause a partial blockage in the blood flowing to the heart, potentially resulting in a heart attack.

DENTAL CARE HELPS TO CONTROL PERIODONTAL DISEASE

Although periodontal disease is a serious health concern, it is preventable. Individuals should brush after meals, floss daily, use an antiseptic mouthwash to maintain good oral health, and regularly schedule dental checkups.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, dental insurance can influence employees' use of dental care services, including regular checkups for periodontal disease. Approximately 80 percent of workers will participate in regular dental care if dental insurance is included in their benefits packages. Unfortunately, only 46 percent of employees in the United States have access to dental care through their employers' benefit programs.

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