

# A healthy heart

## Going to dentist can help prevent heart disease

February ushers in American Heart Month, a time to cherish sweethearts, candy hearts, paper hearts and most importantly your own beating heart.

While diet, exercise and not smoking are front and center in a good heart health plan, one also should add regular dental checkups to prevent gum disease bacteria that could cause serious cardiovascular problems.

"Frequently in consultations with all of my patients I discuss the dangerous link between heart disease and gum disease so that they can alert their family members and friends to the importance of regular dental checkups," Orland Park dentist Dr. Richard J. Pape said.

"I study new research related to gum disease published in journals of the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Periodontology and other respected dental publications."

In worldwide studies, researchers found that people with advanced gum disease — a serious bacterial infection that destroys the attachment fibers and supporting bone that hold teeth in one's mouth — also had a 25 percent to 100 percent increased risk of suffering from a heart attack than those without advanced gum disease.

Pape said he sees a need for a more integrated dental-medical approach in preventing and treating cardiovascular disease. And the mounting evidence linking oral health and heart disease supports Pape's summation:

- A poor oral health diagnosis was a stronger predictor of heart disease than other markers, such as high levels of fibrinogen (a clotting factor), low high-density lipoprotein ("good" cholesterol) or high triglycerides.

- The more teeth people have lost, the greater their risk of cardiovascular problems.

- Older adults who have higher than normal amounts of gum disease bacteria also tend to have thicker carotid arteries.

- The presence of gum disease may increase the risk of a second heart attack in people with a history of heart disease.

- Researchers found an increased risk of coronary heart disease for people younger than 60 who have more than 4 millimeters of alveolar bone (which holds the teeth in the mouth) loss from periodontal disease.

According to Pape, more education and publicity about the links between gum disease and heart health would mean more people scheduling a regular dental care program, which he said would lower their risks of gum disease and improve their overall health.

Pape said gum disease affects 80 percent of American adults, according to the Academy of General Dentistry.

Symptoms include bleeding or swollen gums, bad breath, sores in the mouth and receding gums.

### A BIT OF BACKGROUND

Dr. Richard J. Pape operates a private dental practice at 9443 W. 144th Place, Orland Park. The business offers a range of dental treatments, including preventive, aesthetic and restorative dentistry.

He recently earned the Academy of General Dentistry Fellowship by completing 500 hours of continuing dental education, passing an exam and fulfilling three years of continuing membership.

This Academy of General Dentistry award, which symbolizes excellence in the dental profession, is granted to dentists who provide the highest quality of dental care by remaining current in their profession.

A graduate of the University of Illinois School of Dentistry, Pape is listed in the Guide to America's Top Dentists compiled by the Consumers Research Council of America.

He has completed courses at Aesthetic Pac-Live Continuum, Misch Implant Institute and Rosenthal Esthetic Continuum. Pape is a member of the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and the Illinois State Dental Society.

Pape is also a Fellow of the International Congress of Oral Implantologists.

More information is at (708) 403-9848 or [www.richardpapedds.com](http://www.richardpapedds.com).

He added that one can prevent plaque buildup and minimize the chance of developing gum disease by brushing and flossing and visiting a dentist regularly.

The long term payoff in regard to overall health and even medical expenses is well worth the investment, Pape said.

He cited a recent study released by Aetna and Columbia University College of Dental Medicine.

That study said periodontal care appears to have a positive effect on the cost of medical care, with earlier treatments resulting in lower medical costs for members with coronary artery disease, diabetes and stroke.

For those who have heart, Pape said they should talk to their dentists about their heart conditions and share their complete medical history, including medications.

He added that it is important for people to follow their physicians' and dentists' instructions about health care, including using prescription medications such as antibiotics as directed.