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Periodontal (gum) disease

odha
Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association

Periodontal disease is one of the most common diseases of humans. According to statistics, as many as 75% of adults over the age of 30 may suffer from some form of gum disease at some point in their life. Not only can gum disease cause oral pain, discomfort and tooth loss, it can also seriously affect a person's overall health. The connection between oral infections and other diseases in the body is becoming understood and accepted within the healthcare community. Proper oral care and regular professional scaling (cleaning) by a dental hygienist are important for keeping mouth and body healthy.

How gum disease develops

Periodontal disease is a contagious, chronic bacterial infection that affects the gum tissue, bone and attachment fibers that support the teeth and hold them in place. Gum disease starts slowly without any pain and may not



ILLUSTRATION: NIKOLAE, SHUTTERSTOCK

be apparent until there are serious side effects. Over time, a buildup of plaque bacteria (white, sticky substance) collects at the gum line, eventually hardening on the teeth into calcium deposits called calculus or tartar. Brushing and flossing cannot remove hardened plaque. If the tartar isn't removed with professional scaling by a dental hygienist, the bacteria can cause inflammation of the gums (gingivitis), penetrate the gum line and finally spread into the underlying bone (periodontitis). If left untreated, gum disease can result in abscesses or the complete destruction of the tooth's supporting tissues and, ultimately, tooth loss.

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Signs and symptoms of Periodontal disease

- Red, swollen or tender gums;
- Gums that bleed when brushing or flossing;
- Receding gums
- Deep pockets (the space between the gums and the teeth);
- Metallic taste;
- Tooth sensitivity for no apparent reason;
- Loose or shifting teeth;
- Abscesses;
- Pus around gums and teeth;
- Chronic bad breath.

Information contained in *Health Matters* is intended to be used for general information and should not replace consultation with health care professionals. Consult a qualified health care professional before making medical decisions or if you have questions about your individual medical situation. RTO/ERO makes every effort to ensure that the information in *Health Matters* is accurate and reliable, and cannot guarantee that it is error-free or complete. RTO/ERO does not endorse any product, treatment or therapy; neither does it evaluate the quality of services operated by other organizations mentioned or linked to *Health Matters*.



Scan this QR code with your smartphone to view *Health Matters* in the Members' Centre.

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Causes and risk factors

Smoking is a significant risk factor for gum disease. It reduces blood flow to the gums, depriving them of oxygen and nutrients that help to keep gums healthy. Other risk factors include: ineffective brushing and flossing, stress, poor nutrition and hormones.

The impact on overall health

Most people don't connect oral health with the health of the rest of their bodies. Some research studies strongly suggest a link between gum disease and a person's overall health. The bacteria from oral infections — triggered by simply brushing the teeth or chewing — can enter the blood stream or airways and travel to other parts of the body. These bacteria have the potential to worsen or increase the risk for other types of health problems such as heart disease, stroke and respiratory disorders. Gum infections can also make it difficult to control diabetes.

The connection, according to ongoing studies:

Heart disease and stroke

Bacteria from diseased gums can contribute to the formation of artery-clogging plaques (fatty deposits) perhaps leading to a heart attack or stroke. Also, some oral bacteria may cause infective endocarditis, a condition in which the interior lining of the heart and heart valves becomes inflamed. Left untreated, this condition could cause permanent heart damage or death.

Respiratory

Bacterial respiratory infections are caused by inhaling germs from the mouth and throat into the lungs. When these germs reach the lower respiratory tract, they may cause an infection or

Prevention and home care

With regular and proper oral care, gum disease can be prevented, controlled or even reversed in the early stages.

Between dental hygiene appointments, it is important to maintain good oral hygiene:

- Don't smoke or use smokeless tobacco;
- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet;
- Brush twice a day for two minutes using a soft toothbrush and fluoridated toothpaste;

- Clean or floss between teeth and gums once a day to remove food and plaque;
- Clean or scrape the tongue daily;
- Use a mouth rinse, if recommended by a dental professional;
- Never share toothbrushes;
- Replace toothbrush every two to three months, or when bristles start to bend, and after a cold or flu; and
- Check gums/mouth regularly and report any changes or signs of gum disease to a dental hygienist.

worsen an existing lung infection such as pneumonia, bronchitis, emphysema and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Diabetes

Diabetics are prone to a variety of bacterial infections, including gum disease. Oral infections could make it difficult to control diabetes and cause complications, since the bacteria from severe gum disease may increase both blood sugar levels and the amount of time the body functions with high blood sugar.

Pregnancy

Bacteria from gum disease may trigger an unnatural increase in certain biological fluids — present in a woman's body to help induce labour and contribute to premature deliveries

Treatment

With regular, professional scalings, dental hygienists help control the bacteria that cause gum disease and tooth decay. Dental hygiene treatment includes:

- Reviewing the client's medical history to make sure there are

no medical conditions that could affect treatment;

- Examining the head, neck and mouth including teeth, gums and tongue;
- Using a dental hygiene instrument (periodontal probe) to measure pockets and documenting the findings;
- Scaling (cleaning) teeth to remove plaque bacteria and hardened or calcified plaque buildup (tartar);
- Polishing teeth to remove stains, if required;
- Applying fluoride or other agents to strengthen and desensitize teeth;
- Providing information and counselling on diet, nutrition and smoking cessation;
- Instructing clients on the most effective way to brush and floss;
- Giving advice on the various types of oral care products and how to use them; and
- Helping to devise a treatment plan and developing a customized home care program. ●

Can I rely on my provincial health insurance to cover me if I leave the country?



Government health insurance plans (GHIP) provide limited coverage for medical treatment and hospital costs outside of Canada and each provincial government recommends that residents purchase travel coverage. In addition, GHIP will not pay more than what the service would have cost in your province or territory of residence.

Your portion of the medical bills could amount to many thousands of dollars out of your own pocket.

The RTO/ERO Extended Health Care Plan automatically includes Out-of-Province/Canada travel coverage for any trips of up to 62 days in duration and the Supplemental Travel Plan is available for longer trips. While covered by RTO/ERO, you can rest assured that whether you cross the border for a weekend shopping trip or take an extended holiday, you are covered should an eligible medical emergency arise.

The RTO/ERO travel plans include the following benefits that are recommended by the Government of Canada to ensure your travel protection access to a worldwide:

- 24-hour hotline with multilingual operators, as well as physicians or nurses on staff.
- Covers emergency medical expenses including hospital, physicians and drugs.
- Provides upfront and direct payment of bills so you don't have to be out of pocket.
- Covers emergency transportation, such as ambulance services.
- Provides for medical evacuation to Canada or the nearest location with appropriate medical care.
- Pays for a medical escort (doctor or nurse) to accompany you during evacuation, if necessary.

Question and Answer

Question I am currently covered under the School Board Retiree Plan for my benefits. I would like to apply for the RTO/ERO Group Benefits Program. When will my coverage commence?

Answer Your coverage under the RTO/ERO Group Benefits Program will commence the day after the termination of your previous coverage (your previous coverage can also be your spousal plan or another group insurance plan), provided you apply within 60 days of its termination. Note, to ensure there is no gap in your coverage, premiums and coverage will be back-dated to the day following the termination of your other group plan, regardless of when your application is received in the 60 day period.

Did you know?

That certain claims require the pre-approval of Johnson Inc. Plan Benefits Claims before they may be submitted for reimbursement under the RTO/ERO Health Plans?



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Aids and Appliances benefits

Under the Aids and Appliances benefit, please call Johnson Inc. Plan Benefits Claims for pre-approval of your item, before making your purchase. Plan Benefits Claims will request a written prescription, including diagnosis, from a physician and/or the completion of an authorization form. Additional information may be requested to assess the eligibility of the aid or appliance. This process ensures that you know the amount eligible for reimbursement prior to making your purchase.

There may be financial assistance for your aid and/or appliance available through your provincial Assistive Devices Program (ADP). An application must first be submitted through the ADP for all eligible equipment prior to submitting your claim to Johnson Inc. Reimbursements under the RTO/ERO Aids and Appliances benefit are only off set by the amount eligible for payment through the ADP, whether or not application is made. Please note that if an application for funding is not made to the ADP prior to the purchase, the ADP may decline the item.

Dental Plan

Certain procedures under the RTO/ERO Dental Plan require pre-approval. If the cost of proposed dental work is expected to exceed \$600, you should submit a detailed pre-treatment plan to Johnson Inc. Plan Benefits Claims. For major restorative work, the pre-treatment radiograph will be requested. This pre-approval is not intended to limit you in your choice of dentist, to tell you or your dentist what treatment should be performed, to tell the dentist what fee to charge, or to guarantee reimbursement after coverage ceases. This process advises you of the amount eligible for reimbursement under the plan, before the work begins, for the proposed procedure.

For more information about these benefits, please contact Johnson Inc. Plan Benefits Claims at [1-800-638-4753](tel:1-800-638-4753).

Convalescent Care Benefit

The RTO/ERO Semi-Private Hospital and Convalescent Care Plan includes a Convalescent Care Benefit. This benefit provides coverage for convalescent care in a facility or in your home upon your discharge from hospital.

Facility care

Did you know? The Convalescent Care Benefit provides coverage for a short-term stay in a licensed facility such as a long-term care home or retirement home. The plan covers a maximum of \$75 per day for up to 30 days of care per calendar year, following a minimum 24 hour acute care hospital stay.

Home care

The Convalescent Care Benefit also covers convalescent home care provided in a private residence, following a minimum 24 hour acute care hospital stay. Care may be rendered by a licensed personal support worker or home support worker, or someone without professional skills or training provided that they work under the supervision of a licensed Home Care Agency or Home Health Care Agency. The plan covers a maximum of \$75 per day, up to 30 days of care, per 24 hour hospitalization.

Following non-elective day surgery, which does not require a 24 hour hospitalization, there is also coverage for a maximum of three days of convalescent home care provided in a private residence.

To ensure that the criteria for eligibility for this valuable benefit is met, please contact Johnson Inc. Claims at [1-800-638-4753](tel:1-800-638-4753).

Members Only website

As a participant in the RTO/ERO Group Insurance Benefits, you can use the internet to access and interact with your insurance benefits. The Johnson Inc. Members Only website offers a completely secure and private environment. The information is stored in real-time so claims and coverage information is current.

On the Members Only website you can:

- Access your personal Communications Centre which contains a history of letters Johnson Inc. has sent you. Here you can view and re-print any letter, including your annual Benefit Statement and Income Tax letter;
- View the *Group Benefits Update* and *Going Places* newsletters for the most recent plan information and relevant articles;
- View your coverage and monthly premiums;
- Check eligible benefit maximums, the amounts you have claimed, and when you are eligible to claim again;

- View the product monographs for prescription drugs you have claimed;
- Print personalized claim forms;
- Update your email address; and
- Obtain Johnson Inc. contact information for Plan Benefits Service and Claims, and Home-Auto departments.

Obtaining a confidential user name and password is easy. Visit www.johnson.ca/rto-ero, choose your province of residence and click on “Members Only”. You will need your certificate number, and if you also have home or auto insurance with Johnson Inc., you will require your reference and policy numbers.

This website should become one of your favourites. Remember the link and keep your confidential user ID and password handy to allow you easy access to your personal insurance information.

Supplemental Travel Plan

In September 2013, RTO/ERO announced new rates for the Supplemental Travel Plan. The new rates are based on age as well as total trip length. Not only can RTO/ERO offer rates that are competitive within the travel insurance market, but the high quality coverage was also maintained.

This new rate structure also benefits members applying for couple coverage. If the member is younger than the spouse, the spouse can obtain insurance based on the member's younger age. In this situation, the member

would apply for couple coverage based on his/her age. If the spouse is younger than the member, the member and the spouse can each apply for a single plan based on their own ages.

To apply for the Supplemental Travel Plan, you must be insured under the RTO/ERO Extended Health Care Plan. Applicants are guaranteed acceptance, with no medical questionnaire required. To obtain an application, please contact Johnson Inc. or visit RTO/ERO's website at www.rto-ero.org/supplemental-travel.



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COMPOSITE PHOTO: SANDRA CUNNINGHAM/SILVAE, SHUTTERSTOCK



Sun safety basics

Most of us like to work, play, and relax outside on a sunny day. The warm rays of the sun can feel good on our skin. But too much sun and heat can be harmful, so be careful!

The sun's burning rays are also called ultraviolet radiation or UV rays. UV rays can cause:

- sunburns
- skin cancer
- eye damage
- premature skin aging
- weakening of the body's immune system

Before you head outdoors, follow these sun safety tips.

Sun safety tips

You can protect your family and still have fun under the sun.

- **Cover up.** Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts, pants, and a wide-brimmed hat made from breathable fabric. When you buy sunglasses, make sure they provide protection against both UVA and UVB rays.
- **Limit your time in the sun.** Keep out of the sun and heat between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. When your shadow is shorter than you, the sun is very strong. Look for places with lots of shade, like a park with big trees, partial roofs, awnings, umbrellas or gazebo tents. Always take an umbrella to the beach.
- **Use the UV Index forecast.** Tune into local radio and TV stations or check online for the UV index forecast in your area. When the UV index is 3 or higher, wear protective clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen.
- **Use sunscreen.** Put sunscreen on when the UV index is 3 or more.
- **Drink plenty of cool liquids (especially water)** before you feel thirsty. If sunny days are also hot and humid, stay cool and hydrated to avoid heat illness. Dehydration (not having enough fluids in your body) is dangerous, and thirst is not a good indicator of dehydration.

- **Avoid using tanning beds.** If you do use them, understand the risks and learn how to protect yourself.

Did you know?

Even animals practice sun protection! Chimpanzees avoid the midday sun and hippos secrete pink-coloured oil that acts like a sunscreen to protect their skin from sunburn.

Sunscreen safety tips

- **Choose a high SPF.** Protect your health by using a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15. The sunscreen should also say "broad-spectrum" on the label, to screen out most of the UVA and UVB rays.
- **Look for "water resistant."** Look for claims on the label that the product stays on better in water (water resistant, very water resistant).
- **Read application instructions.** For best results, be sure to follow the instructions on the product label.
- **Use lots of sunscreen.** Use the recommended amount of sunscreen.
- **Apply it early.** Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before you go outside; reapply 20 minutes after going outside and at least every 2 hours after that. Use a generous amount. Cover exposed areas generously, including ears, nose, the tops of feet and backs of knees.
- **Reapply often.** Reapply sunscreen often to get the best possible protection especially if you are swimming or sweating heavily.
- **Protect yourself.** Sunscreen and insect repellents can be used safely together. Apply the sunscreen first, then the insect repellent.
- **Sunscreens and babies.** Do not put sunscreen on babies less than six months of age. Keep them out of the sun and heat as their skin and bodies are much more sensitive than an adult's.



Enhanced claims submission

Effective August 2013, Johnson Inc. successfully launched its eClaim initiative for chiropractors, physiotherapists, opticians, optometrists, massage therapists, acupuncturists and naturopathic specialists. With eClaims, these healthcare providers have the ability to submit your claims to Johnson Inc. online, on the spot, making the process fast, convenient and paperless.

The arrangement between Johnson and TELUS Health means that these claims are now processed real-time with instant confirmation of payment, and you may only have to pay the provider the portion not covered by your insurance plan. It reduces any out-of-pocket expense and you do not need to wait to receive your reimbursement.

Visit TELUS Health website at www.telushealth.com/solutions-for-consumers to locate participating health providers in your neighbourhood. If your provider is not part of the TELUS network, have them visit TELUS at www.telushealth.com/registration to join their network.

- Test for an allergic reaction. Before using any sun protecting product on you or your child check for an allergic reaction, especially if you have sensitive skin. Apply it to a small patch of skin on the inner forearm for several days in a row. If the skin turns red or otherwise reacts, change products.

Did you know?

Sunscreens are not meant to increase the amount of time you spend in the sun. They are meant to increase your protection when you are outside.

Remember

- It is important to protect against UV rays all year round, not just in the summer.
- Reflections off snow, water, sand and concrete can increase the effect of UV rays. You need to protect yourself on cloudy days, when you're swimming, and even while skiing.
- Children learn best by example. Model sun-protective behavior yourself.
- In extreme heat, some medications may increase your health risk and/or make your skin more sensitive to UV rays. If you are taking medication, ask your health care provider if it increases your risk, and follow their recommendations.
- Tanning beds and lamps will damage your skin and should be avoided.
- Sunless tanning products like bronzers are an alternative to tanning and come in different forms (sprays, lotions, towelettes). But while these products may give your skin a golden colour, they do not offer any UV protection. You still need to practice sun safety when using these products.

Source: Government of Canada www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/environment-environnement/sun-soleil/safety-protection-eng.php

Become an organ donor

There are more than 4,500 people waiting for organ transplants in Canada today.

Unfortunately, only a fraction of Canadians are registered to donate. It only takes a few minutes to become an organ and tissue donor. In those few minutes, the opportunity to give the most precious gift — life — could be yours.

If you decide to become an organ and tissue donor, discuss it with your family and friends. Loved ones are always asked before donation happens, so it's important that they know your wishes.

If you have questions about how organ donation affects your religious or spiritual practice, speak with your spiritual leader.

It is important to register to be a donor. There are different ways to register and decide what you want to donate depending on your province or territory.

For more information, choose the area where you live in www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/health-sante/donation-contribution-eng.php.