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Healthy Smile May be Linked to a Healthy Heart

(MEADOWBROOK, PA) – Recent studies have shown that gum disease may do more than threaten a person’s smile. It may also contribute to heart disease.

“Several studies in recent years have shown a possible link between gum disease and heart attack, heart disease and stroke,” says Dr. Andrew Mustin, a cardiologist with the Cardiovascular Center at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center. “In one study, those with severe gum disease were twice as likely to have coronary artery disease as their peers with healthy gums.”

Researchers have two main theories to explain the connection, says Dr. Mustin.

“One theory is that for those with gum disease, bacteria ‘pumps’ out of the gums when they chew, talk and swallow,” says Dr. Mustin. “These germs then enter the bloodstream and attach to cholesterol plaque in the heart’s blood vessels. The fatty plaque and bacteria complex can contribute to blood-clot formation, which can lead to a heart attack.”

Another theory is that when these bacteria enter the bloodstream an inflammatory response is elicited. This inflammation can occur in the arterial wall and lead to the progression of atherosclerosis and even heart attack.

To maintain a healthy smile – and possibly a healthy heart – Dr. Mustin recommends the following strategies for good oral hygiene:

- Brush at least two times a day, and floss once a day
- Don’t use tobacco in any form
- Eat a healthy diet and limit foods high in sugar
- Visit the dentist for regular checkups and cleanings
- Watch for signs of gum disease, including tender or bleeding gums, loose teeth, bad breath or a bad taste in the mouth

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“While these studies don’t necessarily show that gum disease on its own causes heart disease or stroke, clinical evidence does support some connection,” says Dr. Mustin. “However, more research is needed. Until then, the best defense is to use a common sense approach. Practice good oral health habits and be on the lookout for problems with your teeth and gums.”

The Cardiovascular Center at Holy Redeemer offers an experienced team of cardiologists, interventional radiologists, vascular surgeons, nurses and technologists who provide advanced care and deliver the best outcomes for patients. They are highly experienced in treating complex cardiovascular conditions, from blocked coronary arteries to deep vein thrombosis and delivering advanced life-saving procedures such as angioplasty and stent placement. The center also offers state-of-the-art equipment for diagnosing and treating cardiac and peripheral vascular conditions. And as a member of the Temple Heart Network, the center is backed by the collaborative resources and facilities of an academic medical center. For more information about heart health, please call 1-800-818-4747 or visit www.heartatholyredeemer.com.

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