

The Dental Disease and Osteoporosis CONNECTION

Osteoporosis may increase the damage that gum (periodontal) disease can do to bone supporting the teeth.

Osteoporosis primarily weakens bone in the hips, spine, and wrists, increasing the risk of fractures. However, the disease can also damage the bone to which teeth attach. Certain dental x-rays may actually show the first signs of osteoporosis.

Gum (periodontal) disease

- » It's a bacterial infection. A germ-infested film forms on the teeth (plaque). Over time, if not removed with thorough daily brushing and flossing, the film begins to harden forming a gritty deposit on the teeth (calculus / tartar). While plaque can be removed with oral hygiene, calculus needs to be scrapped off by dental professionals.
- » The combination of a bacterial infection with the physical irritation caused by calculus creates inflammation of the gums and destruction of the underlying bone. And as that progresses, the teeth become increasingly "wobbly" as the supporting bone erodes away.
- » By weakening the bone where teeth attach, osteoporosis can accelerate and increase the damage that gum disease can create.
- » Preventing gum disease is particularly important, especially if you are at increased risk for osteoporosis (older adults, post-menopausal women, family history, slight stature, smokers, use of steroid medication for such diseases as rheumatoid arthritis).

How to Prevent Dental Infections

- » **Excellent oral hygiene.** Preventing infection and inflammation of the gums is important since substantial damage can occur to the underlying teeth-supporting bone if weakened by osteoporosis.
- » **Thorough daily oral hygiene is key.** Bacterial plaque should be removed from the cheek, biting, and tongue surfaces of each tooth twice daily with a soft-bristle toothbrush. The two side surfaces should be cleaned at least once a day with floss or a floss substitute, such as opal pix.
- » **Use fluoridated toothpaste.** Fluoride can help prevent cavities from developing. And because dental infections are caused by bacteria, your dentist may also recommend using toothpaste that also has antibacterial properties, such as baking soda with peroxide.
- » Based on your risk for developing periodontal disease, your dentist may also recommend use of a **mouth rinse** with antibacterial ingredients, such as chlorhexidine.
- » **Regular dental exams.** Schedule regular dental exams so any possible problems can be identified early. The schedule for cleanings should be as frequent as needed to help prevent damage to teeth-supporting bone that may be at risk of being weakened by osteoporosis.
- » **Denture care.** Osteoporosis can also contribute to looseness of full or partial dentures by damaging the bone to which they were fitted. Your dentist may recommend that they be relined, or even replaced, to avoid developing sores and ulcers under poor fitting dentures.

Beware of Side Effect of Medications

Tell your dentist if you are taking or have used Fosamax, Boniva, Actonel, Reclast, Prolia or other bisphosphonate drugs to help treat osteoporosis. A potential side effect of these drugs can be serious damage to your jaw from poor healing after oral surgery. Thankfully, the risk is very small, and with excellent oral health, the need for any oral surgery can be minimized and even avoided.

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT

Please type in this website and take a quick 2-3 minute survey to help us improve our communications about this important topic.



DentalLifeline.org/osteoporosis

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