

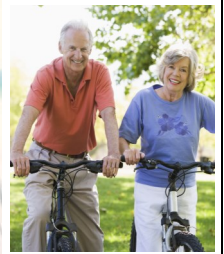


**MICHIGAN STATE
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Extension

Senior Health Line

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Oral Care and Overall Health



We all know that regular visits to the dentist are important for healthy teeth and gums, but our oral hygiene goes way beyond our mouths to keep us healthy.

In a study presented by the Infectious Diseases Society of America, people who never saw a dentist were 86% more likely to contract bacterial pneumonia compared to those who reported going to the dentist twice a year for regular dental checkups. The implication from this study is that there are many bacteria that live in the mouth. Dental cleanings will not remove all of the bacteria, but will significantly reduce the amount of bacteria in the mouth, reducing the levels of bacteria that cause lung infections including pneumonia. Each year approximately one million people in the United States contract pneumonia and 50,000 die as a result of it. It is strongly believed that good dental care can reduce these numbers.

There also appears to be a link between the bacteria that live in the mouth and atherosclerosis, the disease where plaque builds up inside the arteries. Atherosclerosis

reduces the flow of blood throughout the body by narrowing the area that blood can travel through the vascular system to organs throughout the body. This can lead to hypertension (high blood pressure), heart attacks and strokes.

Although they are both referred to as plaque, dental plaque and the plaque that builds up in the vascular system are different. Dental plaque is a film that builds up on the teeth that can lead to gum disease, tooth decay and even bone loss. It is made up of bacteria and other microorganisms. Arterial plaque is made up of fatty deposits that attach to the lining of the blood vessels. As arterial plaque builds up in the arteries, the arteries narrow and make it more difficult for blood to flow.

Those who have heart disease have special needs that need to be addressed when going to the dentist. Bacterial endocarditis is an inflammation of the heart valves or the lining of the heart that is caused by a bacterial infection. Dental work can lead to bacteria entering the bloodstream and settle in the heart. People who have had a history of endocarditis are advised to let their dentist know of this history before having work done on their teeth and gums.

Also, many heart patients take blood thinners which may lead to excessive bleeding from dental procedures. Some medications for high blood pressure can also alter your sense of taste or cause dry mouth. Calcium channel blocking drugs can cause the gums to swell and even over grow. Medications you are taking should be discussed with your dentist before treatment.

If anesthesia is required for dental procedures, be sure to discuss high blood pressure with your dentist if you have been diagnosed with hypertension. Often times, epinephrine is added to local anesthesia. The use of epinephrine can lead to blood pressure spikes that are extremely dangerous and can cause heart attacks, arrhythmias, strokes and chest pain.

And while most of us have been told to brush after every meal, new research has shown that brushing too soon after meals and snacks can be harmful to our teeth. This is especially true if the food or drink is acidic. The acid in foods that we consume breaks down the enamel and the layer right below it called the dentin. Brushing too soon after eating can actually push the acid deeper into the enamel and dentin. Dr. Howard Gamble, president of the Academy of General Dentistry recommends to wait at least 30 minutes after eating to brush your teeth. Dr. Gamble suggests rinsing your mouth with water or using an acid neutralizing mixture of one part baking soda with eight parts water.

For the sake of your overall health, pay attention to your dental needs. See your dentist regularly. Discuss your health history, including medications you are taking with your dental professional and brush and floss as recommended.

Pasta with Chick Peas, Spinach and Raisins

This recipe is a good source of grains, protein, fruit, vegetables and some dairy. Serve it with a side salad and you have a complete, well balanced meal.

3 cups dry whole grain bow tie pasta
2 Tablespoons olive oil
4 cloves of fresh garlic, chopped
10 ounces chick peas, drained and rinsed
½ cup low sodium chicken broth

½ cup golden raisins
4 cups fresh spinach, washed and chopped
2 Tablespoons fresh grated Parmesan cheese
Black pepper to taste.

Prepare the pasta as directed on the package and drain. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until soft. Add the chick peas and chicken broth. Cook an additional 3 minutes, then add the raisins and spinach. Continue cooking until the spinach wilts, about another 3 minutes. Remove from heat and pour sauce over the cooked pasta. Top with the Parmesan cheese and fresh ground pepper. Serve immediately. Makes 6 servings.

Nutritional Value per serving

Calories 280

Protein 11 grams

Carbohydrate 44 grams

Fat 7 grams

Fiber 8 grams

Sodium 130 milligrams



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