

About this document: This is an installment of the Massachusetts State Oral Health Series (MOHS), developed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). The series focuses on important issues in oral health in the state through topic-specific installments to be released over time. Please visit www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-oral-health for more information.

FOCUS ON ORAL HEALTH

Practicing good oral health is an important part of maintaining overall health. **There is increasing evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between chronic disease and oral health.**¹ MDPH is helping to make sure those with chronic diseases and those at risk for developing chronic disease receive the oral health care they need through prevention and early treatment.

THE LINKS

between chronic disease and oral health

What are chronic diseases?¹

Chronic diseases make up the top causes of death and disability in the United States.² These are conditions that last longer than a few months. The top chronic conditions in the United States are **heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and arthritis**. Many of these have been linked in some way to gum disease and tooth decay.

What are oral health conditions?¹

Oral conditions are varied, including everything from tooth sensitivity to mouth sores. **Periodontal disease (gum disease) and tooth decay (cavities), in particular, have both been linked to some of the top chronic diseases.**



What are the links between chronic diseases and oral conditions?¹

Studies have suggested that those who have the following chronic diseases may be more likely to develop gum disease and tooth decay²⁻⁶:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Respiratory Disease
- Cancer
- Obesity

For some chronic diseases, the relationship between with oral conditions goes both ways. For example, diabetes may cause gum disease and gum disease may also make diabetes worse.²

It is important to note that many oral conditions are treatable and preventable if discovered early! It is important to see a dentist regularly to prevent and treat these conditions.

ADDRESSING RISK FACTORS

Some chronic diseases and oral conditions have the same risk factors. **Addressing the common risk factors early can help prevent both chronic diseases and oral conditions.**¹The common risk factors include:

- **Tobacco use:** Using tobacco can lead to chronic diseases such as cancer, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Tobacco use can also lead to gum disease and cavities.
- **Alcohol use:** Alcohol use can lead to diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. It has also been linked to gum disease and cavities.
- **Poor diet and obesity:** Diets that are low in certain nutrients and high in sugar and fat can lead to chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Poor diet has also been shown to lead to gum disease and cavities.

If you have any of the above risk factors, talk to your doctor or dentist about what resources are available to help you reduce your risk for both chronic disease and oral health conditions.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

For those who have chronic diseases



Talk

Talk to your doctor about developing a plan for dental care, including seeing a dentist regularly, based on your condition. If you do not have a dentist, your doctor can help you find one. A dentist can help prevent and treat oral conditions that may come about due to your condition.



Practice

Practice good oral hygiene daily. Brush your teeth twice a day and floss once a day to prevent tooth decay and gum disease, which may make chronic diseases worse.



Look

Look for any changes to your teeth and gums to monitor your oral health over time. If you notice any changes to your gums or teeth or are experiencing any pain, call your doctor or dentist as soon as possible.



Reduce

Reduce your risk factors for both chronic diseases and oral conditions including tobacco use, alcohol use, and poor diet. Ask your doctor or dentist for resources that can help you reduce these risks.

For those who do not have a chronic disease

PREVENTION IS KEY - It is important to note that everyone should take steps toward achieving good oral health to prevent oral conditions and other chronic conditions from developing.

- Make sure to **practice good oral hygiene** by brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing once a day.
- Also, make sure to **see a dental provider regularly** to monitor any changes to your oral health over time. Talk to your doctor about finding a dentist, if you do not already have one.

References

1. Healthy People 2020 Oral Health and Chronic Disease: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/leading-health-indicators/2020-lhi-topics/Oral-Health>
2. Mark, A. M. (2016). Diabetes and oral health. The Journal of the American Dental Association, 147(10), 852.
3. Mathews, M. J., Mathews, E. H., & Mathews, G. E. (2016). Oral health and coronary heart disease. BMC Oral Health, 16(1), 122.
4. Scannapieco, F. A. (2014). Individuals with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may be more likely to have more severe periodontal disease than individuals without COPD. Journal of Evidence Based Dental Practice, 14(2), 79-81.
5. Fitzpatrick, S. G., & Katz, J. (2010). The association between periodontal disease and cancer: a review of the literature. Journal of dentistry, 38(2), 83-95.
6. Nakamura, M., Ojima, T., Nakade, M., Ohtsuka, R., Yamamoto, T., Suzuki, K., & Kondo, K. (2016). Poor Oral Health and Diet in Relation to Weight Loss, Stable Underweight, and Obesity in Community-Dwelling Older Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study From the JAGES 2010 Project. Journal of Epidemiology, 26(6), 322-329.