

Introducing Dental Currents -

The purpose of **Dental Currents** is to provide our dental clients with up-to-date, helpful information so that they will be better able to accept responsibility for their dental health. While your dental team may act as your coach, it is you who must actually play the game. **Dental Currents** is about what you can do for yourself, rather than what we can do for you.

Chapter 1

Dental/Systemic Disease Links

Dental diseases like periodontal disease and tooth decay used to be thought of as oral bacterial diseases, which made them specific to the mouth. The understanding was that the toxins from the oral bacteria actually created periodontal breakdown, while acids caused the tooth to decay. Cleaning our teeth with toothbrushes and floss were our main weapons of defense. So why didn't we just prescribe an antibiotic to kill the bacteria and correct the problem? Recent research demonstrates that while the oral bacteria may serve as an irritant, they are not responsible for the breakdown of teeth or gums.

When the body is irritated or stressed, it defends itself with inflammation. This is our normal defense and it is characterized by pain, redness, heat and swelling. Three examples are red, swollen gums when you don't brush your teeth and gums (gingivitis), painful sunburn when you get too much sunshine or sore, red eyes when they are irritated by cigarette smoke. All of these different stressors trigger the same inflammatory response in the area of injury. With all of these examples, we can see the results because they are on the outside surfaces of our body. How about the inside surfaces?

A similar inflammatory response is triggered on inside surfaces when they are irritated. Blood vessels are irritated by high blood glucose levels and they respond with inflammation. Diabetics suffer from neuropathy (numb feet), retinopathy (diabetic blindness) and poor wound healing due to a chronic or long term inflammatory response. Cardiovascular disease is mainly blood vessel inflammation that is trying to heal by patching the damaged walls with cholesterol containing plugs or plaques. Cholesterol is not the main problem, inflammation is. Even some cancers start with inflammation. Consider lung cancer in smoker's inflamed lungs or the risk of skin cancer for sun lovers.

Inflammation is the link between periodontal disease, tooth decay, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers and any disease that ends in "itis". (arthritis, bronchitis, diverticulitis, appendicitis, and on and on) The importance of *Dental Currents* becomes apparent when we realize that the more we can learn about managing inflammation will have a beneficial effect on both our dental and overall health.