

Professional Dental Cleaning - What You Need to Know, Part 1

One of the most valuable services you can receive from your dentist's office is a professional dental cleaning. In the past, you may have thought of this service as "just a cleaning" or simply "polishing teeth". You are not alone. In fact, many patients believe that coming in for regular cleanings is not very important. After all, nothing is hurting, no "fillings" or crowns are being prepared or placed, and you brush your teeth every day. Right?

The truth is, a professional dental cleaning is an important service your dentist and dental hygienist provide to help you prevent the emergence or growth of dental disease. The dental term for a professional cleaning is *prophylaxis*, which is "a measure taken for the prevention of a disease or condition". In dentistry, a prophylaxis, or professional dental cleaning, functions as just that.

The mouth is a breeding ground for all types of bacteria and infections; so preventing these problems from overwhelming a person's defenses is very important. Your oral health and the possible development of gum and bone disease are not the only considerations. Your general health is greatly affected as well! In recent years the importance of reducing or eliminating mouth bacteria and infections has become well known. While your dentist and dental hygienist have always realized that the bacteria that breed and spread in the mouth can have a negative affect on your general health; this fact is finally being recognized by the medical world as a whole. Conditions in the mouth can make systemic diseases (diseases that affect the entire body) much worse. Keeping the oral bacterial load under control has never been more important. Here's why:

- Studies show that bacterial infection and tissue inflammation are important factors in periodontal (gum and bone) disease. Bacterial byproducts and the inflammation they can cause in the body can also be major factors in the development of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and other serious problems. What does this mean? It appears that inflammation is a significant link between systemic (body) disease and oral disease.
- Inflammation is the first response of the immune system to injury, infection or irritation. When the body's immune system senses an infection, a series of reactions begins which are designed to protect the entire body, not just the area directly involved. However, if an infection in the mouth persists, the inflammatory process can never shut down! The body thinks it is under constant attack.
- Periodontal (gum and bone) disease typically begins from bacteria growing around the teeth, causing infection and starting up the body's inflammatory

response. The combined “one-two punch” of bacterial attack plus inflammatory reaction causes destruction of the gum tissues and bone around the teeth.

A professional cleaning can be the first step in getting your mouth bacteria under control so that your dental health is protected and your immune system can function normally.

Call us if you want to know more. We are always happy to help!

Annals of Periodontology 2002 Dec. 7