



JAMISON STARBUCK, ND

## Natural Ways to Keep Your Teeth Healthy



**D**ental health may seem, at first glance, to have little to do with your overall physical health. But that's not true. For example, an increasing body of scientific evidence links dental conditions to heart disease, diabetes and even certain types of cancer. *Areas of dental health that my patients ask about most often...*

**Periodontal disease.** According to the National Institutes of Health, 25% of Americans over age 65 have lost all of their natural teeth. Much of this is due to periodontal disease—including inflammation of gums (gingivitis) and/or bones around the teeth (periodontitis). For the most part, periodontal disease is preventable, but you may have to do more than just brush and floss.

To fight periodontal disease, you need a strong immune system, a limited amount of harmful bacteria in the mouth and healthy gum tissue. The standard advice is to avoid tobacco as well as sugary foods and beverages—and brush two to three times daily and floss once daily. You will have even greater success if you also use a daily regimen of 1,500 mg of vitamin C...20,000 international units (IU) of vitamin A\*...60 mg of the antioxidant CoQ10...and one-half cup of antioxidant-rich berries, such as blueberries and blackberries (fresh or frozen), or purple grapes. These nutrients help you maintain a strong immune system and healthy gums.

**Fluoride.** For years, we've been told that fluoride hardens tooth enamel, thereby reducing tooth decay that can lead to cavities. However, some research indicates that this mineral may not reduce cavities or fight harmful bacteria in the mouth and actually may increase the risk for hip fracture. Fluoride also has been linked to osteosarcoma (bone cancer) in teenage boys who were exposed to the mineral during childhood. Instead of using fluoride in toothpaste and other dental products, I recommend a regimen that includes good dental hygiene (as described above)...and the use of xylitol, a safe, plant-derived sugar product. Xylitol is available in toothpastes and chewing gums that are sold at health-food stores and pharmacies.

A study published in the *Journal of the American Dental Association* found that xylitol reduces levels of harmful bacteria in the mouth and discourages the formation of cavities. While cavity risk is greatest in children (whose teeth are still forming), some adults are also in jeopardy—especially smokers, older adults, people with dry mouth syndrome, which often results from Sjogren's syndrome (an autoimmune disease)...radiation therapy to the head or neck...or medication side effects.

**Mercury fillings.** This is a controversial issue. While the American Dental Association has stated that amalgam (mercury-containing) fillings are not dangerous, mercury toxicity may lead to neurologic problems, such as memory loss, and autoimmune disease, such as lupus. My approach is to test mercury levels (via a urine sample) in patients who have many of these fillings as well as symptoms, such as chronic fatigue and pain. If levels are high, I recommend removing amalgam fillings and replacing them with non-mercury material, such as composite resin.

\*Pregnant women and people with liver disease should not exceed 5,000 IU daily.

Jamison Starbuck, ND, is a naturopathic physician in family practice and a lecturer at the University of Montana, both in Missoula. She is past president of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians and a contributing editor to *The Alternative Advisor: The Complete Guide to Natural Therapies and Alternative Treatments* (Time Life). Please send comments and suggestions for future columns to Dr. Starbuck in care of *Bottom Line/Health*, Box 10702, Stamford, CT 06904-0702...or via E-mail at [Starbuck@BottomLineHealth.com](mailto:Starbuck@BottomLineHealth.com).

earlier than women. Men usually develop coronary artery disease 10 to 15 years earlier than women do, and they're more likely to die from it before age 65. *Main reasons...*

■ **Abdominal obesity.** Women tend to accumulate excess weight in the buttocks and hips...men tend to get a "beer gut." Abdominal obesity indicates high levels of visceral fat, which is stored around the abdominal organs, and is one of the main risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

**What to do:** Men should measure their waist-to-hip ratio (waist circumference divided by hip circumference) at least once a year. A ratio higher than 0.9 for men is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

■ **Low HDL cholesterol.** Inadequate HDL "good" cholesterol may predict heart disease or a heart attack better than elevated levels of total or LDL "bad" cholesterol.

**What to do:** In addition to tracking blood pressure (anything above 120/80 mmHg requires medical attention), men should be aware of their cholesterol readings, keeping HDL levels high and LDL levels low. If a man's HDL is below 35 mg/dL (40 mg/dL and above is desirable), he should ask his doctor about taking niacin to elevate HDL levels.

**Important:** Men with erectile dysfunction (ED) should be screened for cardiovascular disease. New research indicates that men with ED are nearly 50% more likely to suffer from diabetes or metabolic syndrome (a constellation of symptoms including high blood pressure and obesity)—conditions that greatly increase risk for cardiovascular disease.

### OSTEOPOROSIS

Men account for 20% of osteoporosis cases diagnosed in the US. Because osteoporosis is often considered a "women's disease," many men who are at increased risk—due to smoking, a sedentary lifestyle, excessive intake of alcohol and/or prolonged use of steroid

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