



What is Cardiovascular Disease?

Cardiovascular disease, also called heart disease, includes numerous problems, many of which are related to a process called atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is a condition that develops when a substance called plaque builds up in the walls of the arteries. This buildup narrows the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through. If a blood clot forms, it can stop the blood flow, and this can cause a heart attack or stroke.

A heart attack occurs when the blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked by a blood clot. If this clot cuts off the blood flow completely, the part of the heart muscle supplied by that artery begins to die.

- > Each year, heart disease kills more Americans than cancer.
- > Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death and disability in the United States and most European countries.

How is heart disease related to your mouth?

Several theories exist to explain the link between periodontal disease and heart disease. Oral bacteria can affect the heart when it enters the blood stream, attaching to fatty plaques in the coronary arteries (heart blood vessels) and contributing to clot formation. Coronary artery disease is characterized by a thickening of the walls of the coronary arteries due to the buildup of fatty proteins. Blood clots can obstruct normal blood flow, restricting the amount of nutrients and oxygen required for the heart to function properly. This may lead to heart attacks.

Another possibility is that the inflammation caused by periodontal disease increases plaque buildup, which may contribute to swelling of the arteries. Researchers have found that people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease.

Cardiovascular diseases include the following:

- > Aneurysm
- > Angina
- > Atherosclerosis
- > Cerebrovascular accident (stroke)
- > Cerebrovascular disease
- > Congestive heart failure
- > Coronary artery disease
- > Myocardial infarction (heart attack)
- > Peripheral vascular disease

Treatment Options

Unlike many other chronic medical conditions, cardiovascular disease is treatable and reversible, even after a long history of disease.

Because periodontal disease can exacerbate existing heart conditions, patients at risk for infective endocarditis— inflammation of the inner lining of the heart—may require antibiotics prior to dental procedures. Your dentist and cardiologist will be able to determine if your heart condition requires use of antibiotics prior to dental procedures.