



CANADIAN  
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from the canadian dental association

Correlations have been found between poor oral health and systemic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. We now know that the consequences of inadequate oral health care can reach further than the mouth. There are two important lessons learned from this scientific knowledge. One is to realize that we need to care for our mouths as well as we care about the rest of the body and the second is that dentists and physicians can together address our health needs and concerns.



As dentists, we see most of our patients on a regular basis, most commonly every six months. At these appointments we take or update detailed medical histories. This unique relationship, combined with our medical knowledge, enables us to form longstanding and trusting relationships with our patients, and to be the “first line of defence” in recognizing medical conditions that may otherwise go undetected.

This relationship and the transfer of knowledge between dentist and patient can lead to discussions on topics that can help with patients’ overall health, such as smoking habits or diet. It has often been said that the mouth is “a window to the body”, allowing us to look inside and potentially discover what may be happening in other areas. One example is oral cancer — where we now routinely screen our patients and are trained to recognize the early signs of this disease. We would recommend that our patients seek medical attention if this were the case. In fact, we are well-positioned to make referrals to other specialists as required.

The close working relationship that now exists between dentists and physicians is greater than it has ever been. This sense of connectedness begins at our universities where more and more dental and medical students

are exposed to a similar curriculum and work side by side in the early stages of their studies.

Furthermore, the relationship continues within academia as medical and dental researchers are teaming up with their colleagues in other health fields to form multidisciplinary teams of researchers to try to solve complex health issues. The reality that groups like dentists, physicians, nurses, and social workers need to work together to help a patient in all aspects of health, is becoming more accepted.

A hallmark of the profession of dentistry has been our continued emphasis on preventive medicine. As a result of dentists promoting prevention, generations of Canadians are now enjoying improved oral health for much longer in their lifetimes. Dentists can help their patients feel better about themselves by improving their health and their smile and helping them enjoy all aspects of life. With many techniques at our disposal, ranging in complexity from tooth whitening to dental implants, dentists can improve the quality of life of patients and help positively impact our oral and overall health.

As a profession, dentistry will continue to work together with the medical profession to empower Canadians to help you take control of your oral and overall health.

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