Dentists are Disease Detectives

Your mouth performs a range of important daily activities including eating, drinking, talking and smiling. But did you know that your mouth can also provide clues to other diseases? Dentists can act as disease detectives by simply examining your mouth, head and neck for signs and symptoms that may point to more serious health issues.

During routine checkups, dentists not only look for cavities and gum disease, but also monitor symptoms like breath odor, unexplained sores and tooth erosion. If certain signs are detected, dentists can urge patients to seek medical attention to help better manage their oral health and overall health. Dentists are at the forefront of saving lives, as more than 90 percent of common diseases have oral symptoms and can be detected in the dental chair.[1]



It's important to remember that just because you haven't had a cavity in a while or haven't had any tooth pain recently, that doesn't necessarily mean you are in the clear. Be sure to visit your dentist regularly to ensure your oral health and overall health are being monitored and in good standing.

Did you know?

More than 120 signs and symptoms of nondental diseases can be detected through a routine oral exam.[2]

Quick bites

Health problems with oral signs:[3]

- **Anemia:** Burning, fiery red tongue, swelling of the corners of mouth or pale gums.
- **Anorexia nervosa and bulimia:** Erosion of tooth enamel, fillings raised above the eroded tooth surfaces, sensitive teeth, enlarged parotid glands and sweet-breath aroma.
- **Deficient immune system (HIV positive):** Thrush mouth, unexplained sores, nonremovable white areas on the sides of the tongue.
- **Diabetes:** Dry mouth, distinctive breath odor, burning tongue, high rate of tooth decay, inflammation and infections in the mouth.
- **Heart disease:** Pain radiating to the jaw.
- **Kidney failure:** Retarded tooth development in children, dry mouth, odor, metallic taste and ulcers on the tongue and gums.

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1. Academy of General Dentistry, "Warning Signs in the Mouth Can Save Lives," web. **2.** James W. Little et al., Dental Management of the Medically Compromised Patient (St. Louis: Mosby, 2012). **3.** Steven L. Bricker et al., *Oral Diagnosis, Oral Medicine and Treatment Planning* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1994).

Healthy Smile, Happy Life

Delta Dental of Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee

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