

THE MICROORGANISMS IN OUR BODY

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According to Dr. Gerald P. Curatola in the mouth-body connection we host 100 trillion microorganisms in our body and about 37 trillion cells. Not only do we know that human health depends on maintaining a balanced relationship with and within complex communities of microorganisms, but microbes are recognized to contribute to disease in previously unexpected ways.



If your eyes are the window to your soul, then your mouth is a mirror of your health. Although that idea may seem farfetched, health experts believe that good oral health care does more than prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

"Any disease related to the mouth has an impact elsewhere in the body," says Denis F. Kinane, BDS, PhD, at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

The relationship between the mouth and the rest of the body is bidirectional. Your mouth mirrors what is happening in your body. Some systemic conditions produce signs in the mouth, including increasing the severity of the periodontal disease. At the same time your mouth is the gateway to the rest of your body. Traditional dental health tends to focus on basics like cavities or teeth whitening, but a growing body of evidence suggests that there's also a powerful "mouth-body connection" at play. In other words: The health of your mouth can affect health and well-being everywhere else in the body.

A report from the U.S. surgeon general perhaps said it best: "The mouth is a mirror of health and disease in the body." Most of us see our teeth every day when we look in the mirror. But when was the last time you actually studied them closely?

Here are four great ways to check out your teeth for clues as to what's going on elsewhere in the body.

1. Red, swollen gums that may bleed are the hallmarks of periodontal disease—an incredibly common condition that affects more than 47 percent of Americans 30 and older and more than 70 percent of adults 65 and older, according to the CDC. Research shows that diabetes is a major risk factor for periodontitis. The disease is also linked to a higher risk of heart attack and stroke.
2. Eating garlic knots and forgetting to brush your tongue aren't the only causes of bad breath. In some cases, especially if you already have a solid brushing and flossing regimen in place, a lingering case of halitosis can signal a health problem, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). You may not even know you have it since GERD is sometimes a silent condition and can occur during sleep. But over time, GERD can wear away your teeth. In fact, research shows that 24 percent of people with GERD have tooth erosion, which a dentist can easily spot. These are other silent signs of acid reflux you might overlook.

3. Gaps in the teeth can indicate that you have tongue thrusts, or what's also called a reverse swallow. This can be due to a large tongue or thumb sucking as a kid, but **also allergies or nasal congestion that force you to breathe through your mouth.**
4. Loose teeth, including dentures that have become loose, and receding gums can be signs of **low bone mineral density**, which can lead to osteoporosis.
5. If your mouth feels as dry as a desert, certain medications may be to blame, but one possible cause is the autoimmune disease **Sjogren's syndrome**, which primarily affects women over 40. With the disease, the body attacks the glands that make saliva and tears, causing dryness in the mouth and eyes and increasing the risk of cavities.
6. The color of your tongue can indicate certain diseases.
 - a. **WHITE COATING OR WHITE SPOTS:** Oral thrush (weakened immune system), leukoplakia (tobacco user, precursor for cancer, irritation), oral lichen planus (benign lesion).
 - b. **RED TONGUE:** Vitamin deficiency like folic acid and vitamin B12
7. According to the National Institutes of Health, dentists are in a unique position to identify **celiac disease** in patients if they know what to look for. Even though the condition—an autoimmune disease in which gluten damages the small intestine—is associated with gastrointestinal symptoms, celiac disease can also affect the teeth, leading to dental enamel defects. The disease can cause tooth discoloration: namely, white, yellow, or brown spots on the teeth. It can also cause teeth to appear pitted or banded, like a groove going across the teeth. These defects are symmetrical and typically crop up on the incisors and molars. Other oral symptoms of celiac disease include recurring canker sores; a smooth, red tongue (tongues are normally bumpy); and dry mouth.

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