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# Chronic gum disease linked to tongue cancer

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - In a small study, the gum disease periodontitis was associated with an elevated risk of developing tongue cancer.

Dr. Mine Terzal, from the University at Buffalo School of Dental Medicine in New York, and colleagues compared 51 white men with newly diagnosed cancer of the tongue to 54 cancer-free "controls" who were seen during the same period.

The study excluded people younger than 21 years and those who lacked teeth, had any previous malignancy, and those with an impaired immune system.

Periodontitis leads to bone loss around affected teeth, and the investigators used bone loss seen on X-rays to assess periodontitis. They report, in the Archives of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery, that each millimeter reduction in bone was associated with a 5-fold rise in the risk of tongue cancer.

"Periodontitis is a chronic disease that progresses very slowly," Dr. Terzal noted. "Seeing alveolar bone loss on X-rays indicates the infection has existed for decades, making it clear that periodontitis preceded the cancer diagnosis, and not vice-versa."

The team concludes that larger studies are needed to confirm these findings, and to tease out the effect of tobacco use on the risk of periodontal disease and tongue cancer.

SOURCE: Archives of Otolaryngology: Head and Neck Surgery, May 2007.

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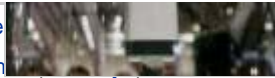
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