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NEWS

Advanced gum disease may increase cancer risk

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Good oral care is key to cancer prevention

A new study suggests a common form of gum disease may significantly raise the risk of head and neck cancer.

Researchers found that people diagnosed with head and neck cancers were much more likely to have chronic periodontitis than people without cancer.

In fact, each millimeter of bone loss due to chronic periodontitis was associated with more than four times higher risk of head and neck cancer, after taking into account other known risk factors such as smoking.

Researchers say the results may help to explain why head and neck cancer rates continue to climb although smoking rates have been declining for the last 40 years.

The study also adds to a growing body of research that shows chronic inflammation and infection can affect the risk of cancer, heart disease, and other health problems.

The study, published in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention*, compared rates of periodontitis in 226 people with head and neck cancer and a comparison group of 207 people without cancer.

The results showed that each mm of bone loss due to chronic periodontitis was associated with a greater than fourfold higher risk of head and neck cancer.

The link between gum disease and cancer was strongest among people with cancers of the mouth, followed by cancers of the oropharynx and larynx.

When the researchers looked at the link between periodontitis and head and neck cancers according to tobacco use, researchers say they were surprised to find it was weaker in current smokers compared with former smokers and those who had never smoked.

'Confirmatory studies with more comprehensive assessment of smoking, such as duration, quantity and patterns of use, as well as smokeless tobacco history are needed,' says researcher Mine Tezal, DDS, PhD, assistant professor at the school of dental medicine at the University of Buffalo.

SOURCE: *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, a journal for the American Association of Cancer Research, 2009