



Article Link: <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/news/20090908/advanced-gum-disease-may-raise-cancer-risk>

## Oral Health Center

### Advanced Gum Disease May Raise Cancer Risk

#### Study Shows Link Between Periodontitis and Risk of Head and Neck Cancer

By [Jennifer Warner](#)  
WebMD Health News

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

Sept. 8, 2009 -- Taking care of your teeth and gums may not only save your smile, it could save your life. 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. Periodontitis is advanced [gum disease](#) that leads to progressive loss of bone and soft tissue that surround the teeth.

In fact, each millimeter of bone loss due to chronic periodontitis was associated with a 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 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 millimeter 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 (back of the mouth and throat) and larynx (voice box).

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, in a news release.

#### 4 Must-See Articles

[What Do Your Teeth Say About Your Health?](#)

[Slideshow: Cold Sores, Thrush and Other Mouth Problems](#)

[Before and After: Cosmetic Dentistry Slideshow](#)

[Slideshow: Conditions That can Harm Your Teeth](#)

[View Article Sources](#)

© 2009 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved.

SHARE  
[What is this?](#)

Digg

[More...](#)