

9 shocking things you can learn about your health just by looking inside your mouth

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As if a trip to the dentist wasn't scary enough. Disney Pixar

- **You mouth can tell you more about your overall health than you think.**
 - **It can indicate if you have diabetes, are at risk for heart disease, and much more.**
 - **Let this be a reminder to take good care of your teeth, as well as the rest of your body.**
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As dreaded as a trip to the dentist may be, it's a necessary evil for your health — and not just your oral health. It turns out, your dentists can tell a lot about your general health status just by looking at your mouth.

"There's a big, for lack of a better word, disconnect between the dental and medical world," dentist [Dr. Jeff Haddad](#) told INSIDER. "[Your mouth is] part of your body, and if something's going on in there, it's going to affect everything [...] I just don't think people realize to what degree."

I definitely fall into this camp. I mean I know that brushing and flossing are good practices for taking care of my mouth, but what exactly does that have to do with the rest of my body?

Here are some of the things you can learn about your health just by looking your mouth.

That you're diabetic or pre-diabetic

Dentist Dr. Gary Glassman told INSIDER that, "ulcers, infections, inflammation of your gums, thrush, bad breath, [and] tooth decay," can all point to diabetes

Since you see a dentist every six months — or should — it's possible that your dentist may spot these symptoms before a general practitioner.

That you might be at greater risk for stroke, heart attack, or cardiovascular disease

[Periodontal disease](#) and cardiovascular disease often go hand-in-hand.

"[B]acteria from inflammation from the gums can enter the bloodstream and then it can travel to the arteries and the heart and cause hardening of the arteries — which is called atherosclerosis — and then once you have that, that can be an increased risk factor for heart attack or stroke," Glassman said. "Not only that, but the inner lining of the heart can also become infected and inflamed as well."

Inflammation is a common cause of chronic disease, even if not all of that inflammation came from the gums. Taking care of them, however, is one small way you can work to keep your heart healthier.

That you're pregnant

Glassman said that the vomit from morning sickness can erode the teeth a bit, while the surge of hormones can make your teeth feel loose in your mouth.



Morning sickness can take a toll on your teeth. [Suhyeon Choi / unsplash](#)

If that wasn't enough, Glassman said it can be quite painful to brush your teeth due to gum sensitivity. Using a softer bristled brush than usual and taking a bit more care can help make brushing an easier proposition.

If you're suffering from morning sickness, Glassman said you should make sure you rinse your mouth out before worse.

That you have sleep apnea

Haddad told INSIDER that worn down teeth are an indicator of sleep apnea. "A lot of people actually clench and grind to open up their airways, so that's kind of self-defense mechanism," he explained. "The first thing I ask people when I see very worn down teeth is if they have a headache issue or even a history of migraines."

Haddad also noted that the tongue can also point to issues. "Sometimes ridges on the sides of the tongue — it's called 'scalloping' — is an 80 percent predictor of a sleep apnea problem."

That you have HPV

Baker said that lesions in your mouth can be one of the earliest signs that you might have HPV.

"Looking at the lips, looking at the salivary gland area, there's a lot of things you can see and detect and that comes down to, of course, making sure that you see your dentist every six months," Glassman added.

If you have kids, you might want to consider the HPV vaccine, which Glassman recommended for all kids, as a preventative measure. Preventing cancer is likely preferable to simply treating it after a diagnosis.

That you have dietary issues

A sudden increase in cavities or tooth erosion can point to malnutrition or an eating disorder. Dr. Jason Goodchild, [Premier Dental's Director of Clinical Affairs](#), told INSIDER by email that eating poorly — whether it's a lack of essential nutrients or a lack of calories — can lead to more cavities (or dental caries).



Various nutritional issues can cause problems in your mouth. [Dominik Martin / unsplash](#)

Additionally, vomiting associated with conditions like bulimia can cause stomach acid to eat away at your teeth. Dentists are a valuable first line of defense when it comes to delicate, but serious conditions such as these.

That you have an autoimmune disease

Autoimmune diseases can be exceptionally difficult to diagnose. Lupus, Crohn's, celiac, and others all can look like many other things, which complicates the matter. According to Goodchild, these conditions can sometimes manifest as "oral mucosal lesions in the mouth," which means that your dentist might be the first one to notice and set you on the path to managing your condition.

That you might have kidney problems

Like cardiovascular disease, there are some links between periodontal disease and kidney issues. Glassman said the inflammation that affects your gums can severely affect your kidneys and other parts of your body because bacteria can get into your bloodstream and move to other parts of your body, wreaking havoc on your organ systems.

Although it's possible to have kidney problems entirely unrelated to inflammation in your mouth, inflamed gums might put you at a greater risk of kidney problems. One of the easiest ways to protect yourself from more serious chronic conditions is to take good care of your mouth by brushing, flossing, and regularly seeing your dentist.

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