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Now's a Good Time to Address Gum Disease

We're all excited to see some businesses, hair salons, gyms and restaurants opening up across the country, all as safely as possible. At this challenging time in our lives, we want to remind folks that while booking their haircuts and dinner reservations they should also be addressing oral or dental questions that may have been put off during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although healthy and fit individuals have contracted the coronavirus, we know from the CDC and other scientific research that individuals of all ages with preexisting conditions like diabetes, and heart and lung disease can be hardest hit. And findings over the last few years point to the link between gum disease and many of these additional systemic conditions.

Gum Disease 101

We have a lot of names for gum disease. In its mildest form we call it gingivitis since it causes inflammation of the tissue around the bases of your teeth known as the gingiva. Gingivitis can usually be prevented with good daily oral hygiene, like simple brushing and flossing with regular dental checkups.

Sometimes, however, gingivitis is caused by smoking or chewing tobacco, dry mouth from certain medications or conditions or even hormonal changes related to pregnancy, all issues that can impact the immune system. Left untreated, gingivitis can progress to a more severe form of gum disease known as periodontitis. The bacteria from this chronic inflammation of the gingiva (gum disease) is thought to possibly enter the bloodstream which can affect other parts of the body.

Keeping Your Immune System Healthy

We depend on our immune systems to help fight off bacteria and challenge infection and diseases like COVID-19. In addition to maintaining good oral hygiene and addressing gum disease if you have it (usually very treatable), ways to assist your immune system include eating healthy foods, sleeping well, exercising and, more recently, practices like social distancing, wearing masks and washing hands thoroughly and more frequently.

Heading Back to Your Dental Practice

Worried about your health exposure? Dental offices are considered one of the safest places to visit post COVID based on recent studies. Dental practices across the country are enhancing safety protocols as a result of the coronavirus, following even more prudent safety guidelines like more frequent disinfecting of surfaces and tools, the wearing of more protective gear, spacing out appointments, and of course checking for temperatures and asking for recent health histories. Many of us have installed multi-tiered approaches to attempt to address potential hazardous particles, protocols that exceed recommendations by authorities like the CDC. These measures include adding high tech air purifying units, extra oral high evacuation suctions and the regular fogging of our offices.

If you exhibit some of the earliest signs of gingivitis, such as bleeding, tender or puffy gums, please call your dentist or periodontist to address the possible issue. Staying healthy is always a top priority—now more than ever!

Dr. Robert A. Levine, a board-certified and internationally acclaimed periodontist, partners with Dr. Philip L. Fava II at the [Pennsylvania Center for Dental Implants and Periodontics](#) in Philadelphia. He is a pioneer in the "immediate load" system for dental implants. Dr. Levine, a Diplomate of the American Board of Periodontology and Fellow of the International Team for Implantology (ITI) lectures around the world. He also co-founded the [Growing Smiles Foundation](#) in 2013, a non-profit organization that provides free dentistry to impoverished children and adults in Peru.