

People who receive periodontal care have better outcomes after heart attack

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The conventional wisdom is that medical and dental care are related, but less is known about how dental care relates to health outcomes after acute incidents like heart attacks.

To that end, University of Michigan researchers studied patients

receiving periodontal care, dental cleanings or no dental care during 2016-2018 and who had [acute myocardial infarction](#) ([heart attack](#)) in 2017.

They found that patients who had heart attacks and received periodontal maintenance care had the shortest length of stay in the hospital, and more follow-up visits. The longest length of stay was experienced by the no-dental-care group.

"After controlling for several factors, the periodontal care group had higher odds of having post-hospital visits," said study co-author Romesh Nalliah, associate dean for patient services at the U-M School of Dentistry.

There was no statistically significant difference between the other groups (active periodontal care and regular care) compared to the no-care group.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*, did not establish a causal relationship between [periodontal disease](#) and [heart disease](#), but research like this adds weight to the understanding that there is an association between oral health and overall health, Nalliah said.

There are 800,000 myocardial infarctions in the United States annually, and those with periodontal disease are at increased risk for hospitalization after a heart attack, he said.

Nalliah and colleagues wanted to examine the association between periodontal care and heart attack hospitalization, and follow-up visits in the 30 days after acute care. Using the MarketScan database, they found 2,370 patients who fit the study criteria. Of those, 47% percent received regular or other oral health care, 7% received active periodontal care

(root planing and periodontal scaling) and 10% received controlled periodontal care (maintenance). More than 36% did not have oral health care before they were hospitalized after a heart attack.

"Dentistry is often practiced in isolation from overall health care," Nalliah said. "Our results add weight to the evidence that medical and dental health are closely interrelated. More and more studies like ours are showing that it is a mistake to practice medicine without the thoughtful consideration of the patient's [oral health](#)."

Nalliah said improved communication between medical and dental teams could help with early intervention to ensure stable periodontal health in patients who have risk factors for heart disease.

"It is important to include [dental care](#) in routine medical care and this means insurances must facilitate this connection rather than offer dental insurance as a separate add-on coverage," he said.

More information: Romesh P. Nalliah et al, Association between periodontal care and hospitalization with acute myocardial infarction, *The Journal of the American Dental Association* (2022). DOI: [10.1016/j.adaj.2022.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adaj.2022.02.003)

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