

Gum disease and tooth loss have been largely overlooked as risk factors for dementia

A close link is emerging between oral health and some of the world's most pressing diseases, including [cardiovascular disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's](#), underscoring the mouth's role as [a mirror of health and disease, and a sentinel for our overall wellbeing](#).

Unfortunately, perhaps the most telling feature of oral health is the most frequently ignored. Periodontitis or deep gum disease, [the second most widespread](#) oral disease after [cavities](#).

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For most, the disease doesn't become noticeable until your 40s or 50s, says Sim K Singhrao, senior research fellow in the school of dentistry at the University of Central Lancashire in the UK. By this time, severe damage may already have undermined the tooth's architecture, risking tooth loss.

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It is this long-term presence of disease-causing bacteria in the gums and the bloodstream that shapes our health well beyond the mouth.

"If you imagine the bloodstream as a bus, it will take passengers on – things like bacteria in the mouth – and it will go everywhere around the body," says Singhrao. "Some will get off in the brain, some in the arteries, some in the pancreas or the liver."

Where there are vulnerabilities in these organs, or when microbes aren't effectively cleared away, they [cause inflammation and start or exacerbate other inflammatory diseases](#).

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