

New study shows more needs to be done to raise public awareness on the impact of good oral health habits on overall health

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Academic studies increasingly demonstrate the links between poor oral health and systemic disease, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and links with complications in pregnancy. But a new research from Ipsos, conducted in partnership with GSK Consumer Healthcare indicates these links are not yet widely known. The findings point to a worrying concern that people may not be proactively looking after their oral health as they should be, and therefore risk not experiencing the wider health benefits good oral health may bring.

A new study by Ipsos and GSK Consumer Healthcare, with 4500 participants across 9 countries, reveals the need to improve public awareness of the benefits of good oral health to our overall health.

Low awareness of the importance of good oral health during pregnancy

During pregnancy, higher hormone levels can change the way the body reacts to plaque build-up, causing swollen gums, an early sign of gum disease. Pregnant women with severe gum disease, also known as periodontitis, are more at risk of giving birth prematurely, suffer pre-eclampsia, or have a baby with low birth weight – meaning good oral health habits and seeking advice from healthcare professionals are critical.

Yet, just 47% of respondents to the survey were aware that good oral healthcare can support a healthier pregnancy, with lower risk of complications. There was even lower awareness of the risks of poor oral health for pregnancy among older respondents who will be

grandparents and often advisors. While 52% of those under 50 knew of the risks, the number fell to just 40% for people aged over 50.

Higher risk groups unaware of oral health links to diabetes

Poor oral health can cause gum inflammation and infection. This can make it harder for the body to control blood sugar levels, and respond appropriately to insulin. In turn, high glucose levels in the saliva of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes sufferers can increase the risk of dental decay, and their high blood sugar levels mean general wounds, including those in the mouth, heal more slowly.

While 58% of respondents between the age 18-25 were aware that good oral health has a positive impact on helping to maintain blood sugar levels and manage diabetes, this number dropped to only 44% for respondents over 50. With the over 50s, being a higher-risk group, more likely to develop type 2 Diabetes, this suggests a need for targeted awareness raising and education.

Oral health links to cardiovascular disease better recognised

Research shows that people with severe gum disease are at higher risk of heart disease. The bacteria that attack gums can spread throughout the body in the bloodstream and can cause inflammation.

56% of respondents were aware that good oral health habits can reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases.

The study highlighted the significant role of regular dental visits in improving understanding of the relevance of oral health to overall health. Respondents who visited a dentist more frequently during the pandemic compared to before were more aware of the impact of oral health on all conditions surveyed.

- 70% of respondents who visited the dentist more frequently compared to pre-Covid times were aware that good oral health can improve the chance of healthy pregnancy compared to 47% of respondents on average.

- 72% of respondents who visited the dentist more frequently compared to pre-Covid times were aware that good oral health can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, compared to 56% of respondents on average.

- 72% of respondents who visited the dentist more frequently compared to pre-Covid times were aware that good oral health can help to manage diabetes compared to 51% average of respondents on average.

Professor Nicola X West, Professor Restorative Dentistry (Periodontology) at Bristol Dental School, said:

The association between oral health and overall health is well-documented by the scientific community. However, public awareness of the wider benefits of careful tooth-brushing, taking care of your oral cavity and regular dentist visits remains worryingly low. There is a real need to show consumers that it can be more than their smile put at risk if they don't take care of their mouths properly.

Dr Stephen Mason, Medical Lead, GSK Consumer Healthcare Oral Health, said:

Being healthy isn't all about broadcasting your runs or snapping photos at the gym – it can be the most mundane, behind-the-scenes habits that have the biggest impact. Good oral care habits like good, regular tooth-brushing using proven effective consumer healthcare products (toothpaste, mouth rinse and floss) are no exception. We need to show people the power of getting these habits right due to the many positive effects this can have on overall health, ultimately reducing the risk of developing a number of health conditions in the long term. As a leading global healthcare company, we work closely with frontline health workers, pharmacists, dentists and government organisations to empower consumers to take better care of their everyday health, and in doing so, relieving pressure on our health services.

In total, 4,500 people were surveyed from five European countries and (France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain and Russia) and four South-East Asian countries (Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand). 500 people over the age of 18 years old were surveyed in each country. The survey was conducted online between 17th and 26th February 2021. The data was mapped proportionally against metadata – age, sex, region – in the total population. In addition, all participants whose data was taken into account agreed to an Adverse

Event Tracker (forwarding to manufacturers in anonymised form any problems with products).

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Our portfolio of loved and trusted brands includes Sensodyne, paradontax, Polident, Advil, Voltaren, Panadol, Otrivin, Theraflu and Centrum.

European Federation of Periodontology, <https://www.efp.org/gum-disease-general-health/oral-health-pre...>

Simpson T.C. et al. (2015) Treatment of periodontal disease for glycaemic control on people with diabetes mellitus. Cochrane Library, <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD00...>

Harvard Medical School - Health Publishing, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/gum-disease-and-he...>

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