



Gum Disease, Tongue Cancer Are Linked in Men, Researchers Find

By James Temple

May 21 (Bloomberg) -- Researchers have for the first time demonstrated a link between chronic gum disease and tongue cancer in men, underscoring the importance of treating an often overlooked condition.

The risk of tongue cancer from periodontitis increased more than fivefold with every millimeter of bone loss in tooth cavities, an established measure of the progression of gum disease, according to a study released in the May issue of Archives of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery. The association remained in the absence of smoking.

If the link is confirmed in larger studies, it would be one reason to pay closer attention to and treat periodontitis, said study co-author Frank Scannapieco, chairman of the Department of Oral Biology at the University at Buffalo. Chronic inflammation, which is often painless and thus ignored, has also been tied to cardiovascular disease, stroke, low-weight infants and other conditions.

``Prevention of oral disease is something people should be aware of; it's doable," Scannapieco said. ``It could reap a lot of benefits, not just in oral cancer."

Scientists have traditionally thought bacteria causes periodontitis. New research suggests viral infections, more typically linked to cancer, might also be involved.

With chronic gum disease, viruses and bacteria could cause changes in surrounding cells that lead directly to cancer or may contribute through inflammation, the study authors said.

The study compared full mouth dental X-rays of 51 white men with tongue cancer against the records of 54 white males without cancer. Other dental conditions such as tooth decay, fillings, crowns and root canals weren't significantly linked to tongue cancer risk, the researchers found.

More than 7,300 people in the U.S. died from oral cancer in 2006, according to the study.

The lead author of the study was Mine Tezal, an assistant professor in the Department of Periodontics and Endodontics at the University at Buffalo School of Dental Medicine. She is also a research scientist at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, another organization involved in the study.

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