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Gum Disease Boosts Tongue Cancer Risk in Men

Periodontitis viruses could trigger the malignancies, researchers say

TUESDAY, May 22 (HealthDay News) -- Chronic gum disease could boost a man's risk for tongue cancer, whether or not he smokes, a U.S. study finds.

Researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo compared 51 men with tongue cancer and 54 men without tongue cancer.

Using X-rays, the researchers assessed periodontitis (chronic gum disease) in the men by calculating the amount of bone loss in the tooth cavities. The study found that men with tongue cancer had significantly greater average bone loss than those without tongue cancer -- 4.21 millimeters vs. 2.74 millimeters.

"After adjusting for the effects of age, smoking status and the number of teeth, each millimeter of [cavity] bone loss was significantly associated with a 5.23-fold increase in the risk of tongue cancer," the study authors wrote. "Other oral variables (the number of dental decays, fillings, crowns and root canal treatments) were not significantly associated with the risk for tongue cancer."

The researchers theorize that periodontal bacteria and viruses may be toxic to surrounding cells and cause changes that lead directly to oral cancer. They may also cause inflammation that indirectly contribute to cancer.

The study is in the May issue of the journal *Archives of Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery*.

This preliminary data suggests an association between periodontitis and tongue cancer, but larger studies that include women and different racial/ethnic groups need to be conducted to confirm this association, the researchers said.

More information

The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more about [oral cancer](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: JAMA/Archives journals, news release, May 21, 2007

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