In years past, a caricature for old age was the toothless elder. It used to be the exception instead of the rule that people kept all their teeth throughout their lives. Due to advances in dentistry and overall improvements in health, people are now keeping their teeth. But in one area of oral health we still have significant challenges: gum disease. Chronic infection and inflammation of the gums can lead to tooth loss, but perhaps more importantly, it is also associated with heart health and even heart attacks. Researchers have found that people with gum disease are TWICE as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease, and there is a correlation to strokes as well. There are many theories why this is so. It may be that the bacteria hiding in the gums adversely affects the heart, and it could be that high levels of chronic inflammation set the stage for the development of artery disease. Therefore, it is much more important to address gum disease than you may have previously thought.

In this Terry Talks Nutrition®, we are going to look at special formulas that can rein in gum disease – naturally!

**Periodontal (Gum) Disease**

Periodontal, also known as gum disease, is essentially the result of plaque and the associated bacteria getting out of control. It starts off simply. Food particles left in the mouth harden into tartar that causes inflammation around the teeth at the gum line. There are other factors – hormones, smoking, and medications – that can exacerbate the problem as well. Plus, some people are simply more prone to problems with their teeth and gums than others. But, primarily, this is a preventable condition.

Gum disease may not seem like a big worry to you – at first. Initially, gum disease may just present itself as a bit of redness and swelling along the base of your teeth.

But the chronic inflammation and infection of periodontal (gum) disease poses a serious risk to your health, and can be very difficult to treat. That’s because the mouth is a perfect hiding place for bacteria. It can be tough – even with thorough brushing and flossing – to weed out the bacteria-containing plaque and debris that can accumulate between teeth.

Left unchecked, the bacteria not only destroy your teeth and sockets, but can actually lead to infection of the bones of the jaw and affect other systems in your body as well.

Did you know that research has found that people with gum disease are more likely to develop heart disease and have high blood sugar as well? The inflammation from periodontal disease increases inflammatory markers in the cardiovascular system, and actually can invade the circulatory system. In fact, individuals with gum disease are twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease as those without it. In some cases, the blood clots that result from irritated gums can travel back through the bloodstream and enter the heart – increasing the risk for heart attacks.

**Reduce Bacteria and Inflammation with Concentrated Plant Oils**

Good dental hygiene and regular checkups are essential. As frightening as the long-term effects of gum disease may be, there are natural ways you can keep bacteria and inflammation from gaining a hold. First, good dental hygiene – brushing and flossing, plus regular checkups – are essential. But I’d like to tell you about some concentrated plant oils that can also make a difference.

**Concentrated Plant Oils: Lab Tested for Excellent Health and Safety**

Concentrated plant oils are laboratory tested to accurately identify elements of their natural chemical composition and are up to 100 times more concentrated than herbal extracts. These powerful plant oils can contain as many as 300 biochemically distinct molecules, each of which is active in the body. Unlike essential oils used for massage and aromatherapy, they are tested and “fingerprinted” based on their specific molecular makeup, species, marker compounds, purity and safety for internal medicinal use.

The concentration process is crucial in working with medicinal plant oils – several tons of plant material may be necessary to yield just one liter (33 oz.) of concentrated oil. This extraordinary potency allows for relatively low doses, but very powerful health benefits. Here are some of the best for fresh breath and a healthy mouth overall.

**Peppermint**

Mint has been a part of cuisine and medicine since ancient times in the Mediterranean, but it may interest you to know that peppermint was a bit of a latecomer. *Peppermint (Mentha piperita)* was actually first discovered in England in 1696, being a natural hybrid of two other mint species. These days, it is used in foods everywhere – from a main ingredient for herbal teas to a popular co-flavor for chocolate.

As a supplemental ingredient, we typically think of peppermint as a flavoring, or in connection with digestion – especially Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

But for anyone looking for a natural way to support healthy mouth and gums, peppermint has a cooling effect on mouth tissue, which accounts for its breath freshening ability. Beyond that, peppermint is like many botanical oils because it is a strong antibacterial, too. In fact, researchers have found that peppermint inhibits some of the most troublesome bacteria, including *Escherichia coli* (E. coli.) Peppermint

More...

When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This column is to provide you with information to maintain your health.

Subscribe to a free weekly health newsletter at www.TerryTalksNutrition.com

www.TerryTalksNutrition.com
Natural Medicines for Periodontal Gum Disease

also shows antioxidant power, helping protect cells from free-radical damage.

**Cinnamon**
One of the best concentrated plant oils you can combine with peppermint for healthy mouth and gums is from cinnamon. *Cinnamon* (*Cinnamomum cassia*) is an evergreen tree that originates in Southeast Asia and is cultivated in Vietnam, China, Burma, and Laos for its bark (and oil processed from its bark). At one time, this star of the botanical world was actually worth more than silver in ancient Rome.

When you read about cinnamon as a supplement, you’ve probably heard about its anti-diabetic effects, and there’s been some positive developments concerning diabetes and cinnamon extracts. It’s definitely an ironic twist to see an ingredient most often associated with sweets and baked goods actually having a moderating effect on blood glucose levels, but I hope that it yields even more good results in the future.

Like so many other plants, cinnamon has more than one use, and research has shown that it has strong antibacterial and anti-fungal capabilities. The compound responsible for this is called “cinnamaldehyde,” and besides inhibiting *Staphylococcus aureus*, it is also effective against four species of Candida, including *C. albicans*.

Cinnamon also appears to protect against tumor growth and inhibits the inflammatory markers that bring about cellular proliferation. Tumor growth in the mouth and gums can be notoriously hard to spot, for the same reason that flossing those back molars (which I fully recommend, by the way) is tough – they’re hard to see or get to.

So, keep up with your trips to the dentist, but get a strong combination of concentrated plant oils – including cinnamon – on your side, too.

**Clove**
Another aromatic plant oil that keeps your mouth and gums healthy comes from clove. *Clove* (*Eugenia caryophyllata*) is native to Indonesia, but is widely cultivated around the world, including Brazil, Tanzania, Madagascar and Sri Lanka. Much of the current research surrounding clove oil and clove extracts has focused on the strength of one of its phenolic compounds, eugenol, which shows a remarkable range of health benefits.

Clove extracts inhibit the growth of oral pathogens like *Porphyromonas gingivalis* and *Prevotella intermedia* associated with dental caries and periodontal disease. Clove oil is also a strong fighter against the yeast species *Candida albicans*. When this bacterial overgrowth occurs in the mouth, it causes lesions on the insides of the cheeks, tongue and tonsils, bleeding gums, a dry sensation in the mouth and throat, and even a loss of taste. This form of yeast infection is known as “thrush.”

Plus, eugenol from clove shows anti-inflammatory effects. Of the many phenolic compounds tested, it is the most potent. In fact, researchers consider eugenol one of the main reasons why clove oil is such an all-around superstar for dental concerns. After all, clove oil has been traditionally used in India for centuries for dental health because of its antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic effects.

**Oregano**
Like many of the herbs in this combination, oregano (*Origanum compactum*) has been used as a culinary and medicinal herb for generations. Originating in the Mediterranean and North Africa, it is currently the focus of research because like these other botanical oils, it is a strong bacterial inhibitor, and is being considered as a natural food preservative.

Because of its excellent ability to fight bacteria – including *E. coli* – it makes perfect sense to include concentrated oil of oregano in any combination for healthy mouth and gums and the digestive system in general.

**Keeping Breath Fresh Naturally**
Of course, for some people – especially those blessed with a healthy mouth and no signs of periodontal disease, keeping fresh breath is a more immediate worry. In this case, I’d recommend concentrated peppermint oil alone.

What I like about peppermint oil is that it is nature’s perfect breath freshener. You know most of the breath fresheners you find in the checkout aisle at the grocery store are loaded with sugar that you definitely don’t need, and that paradoxically makes you want another breath mint shortly after the first one because of the effect the sweeteners have on your breath. Ultimately, they tend to make your mouth feel a lot less clean than you’d like.

I prefer a simple softgel of concentrated peppermint oil. It’s strong, (and can literally be an “eye-opener”), but it works great and doesn’t have any sweeteners, alcohol, or anything artificial – it doesn’t need them. It truly cleans your mouth and makes you feel much better – especially after a meal.

Terry recommends a fresh breath formula with this ingredient. Look for it at your local health food store.

**Mentha piperita**

**Oregano**

Health Matters Throughout the Body
Gum disease is serious, but all too often ignored. It’s just too easy to forget how interrelated all our body’s systems are. I believe that concentrated plant oils are the future of natural medicine for a multitude of health concerns. With this combination of peppermint, cinnamon, clove, and oregano concentrated plant oils, you’ll have a convenient, safe, and strong way to keep your mouth, gums – and so much more – healthy and at their best.

www.TerryTalksNutrition.com