



Wellness

The connection between oral and mental health

If you're feeling blue, your teeth might be, too. People with anxiety or depression may experience a decline in oral health.

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey showed that almost two-thirds of people with depression had a toothache in the last year. And half of people with depression rated their teeth condition as fair or poor. A scientific review found a strong link between gum disease and stress, distress, anxiety, depression and loneliness.

People with stress, depression and anxiety sometimes lose focus on oral health habits. Depression can cause people to brush and floss at irregular intervals, skip dentist visits, have unhealthy diets, and self-medicate with smoking.

Stress manifests itself in the body as a hormone called cortisol. As cortisol increases, the immune system gets weaker. This can leave you vulnerable to gum inflammation and gum disease. In addition, medications for depression and anxiety can cause dry mouth. Lack of saliva can mean food debris, plaque and bacteria aren't getting rinsed from teeth, making it easier for cavities to form.

If you have anxiety, you're more susceptible to canker sores, dry mouth and teeth grinding. These issues may be attributed to a lack of oral care or as side effects of medication.

When depression or anxiety takes a toll on oral health, there are ways to fight back. Maintain your oral health by brushing twice a day and flossing daily. Keep up with these basic oral health habits to keep your mouth in tip-top shape.

Your dentist can help you deal with the oral health effects of depression and anxiety. During your next dentist visit, explain your symptoms and discuss any medications you're taking. This can help your smile stay healthy through all of life's ups and downs.



Scan this QR code to visit the *Grin!* website for more ways to keep your smile healthy and help you make the most of your Delta Dental benefits.