



Gum Disease, Heart Disease Share Genetic Link

Discovery helps explain association between the two illnesses

TUESDAY, May 26 (HealthDay News) -- A genetic link between gum disease (periodontitis) and heart disease has been discovered by German scientists.

The association between periodontitis and coronary heart disease (CHD) has been known for years, but a genetic link between the conditions hadn't been confirmed. The University of Kiel team found that the two diseases share a genetic variant on chromosome 9.

"We studied a genetic locus on chromosome 9p21.3 that had previously been identified to be associated with myocardial infarction [heart attack], in a group of 151 patients suffering from the most aggressive, early-onset forms of periodontitis, and a group of 1,097 CHD patients who had already had a heart attack. The genetic variation associated with the clinical pictures of both diseases was identical," Dr. Arne Schaefer said in a European Society of Human Genetics (ESHG) news release.

He and his colleagues verified this genetic association in additional groups of 180 periodontitis patients and 1,100 CHD patients.

The study was presented May 25 at the annual ESHG conference, in Vienna, Austria.

Because of the link between periodontitis and CHD, "we think that periodontitis should be taken very seriously by dentists and diagnosed and treated as early as possible," Schaefer said. He noted that periodontitis and CHD share risk factors such as smoking, diabetes and obesity.

"Now that we know for sure that there is a strong genetic link, patients with periodontitis should try to reduce their risk factors and take preventive measures at an early stage," he said. "We hope that our findings will make it easier to diagnose the disease at an early stage, and that in future, a greater insight into the specific pathophysiology might open the way to effective treatment before the disease can take hold."

More information

The American Academy of Periodontology has more about [**periodontitis**](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: European Society of Human Genetics, news release, May 25, 2009

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