



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Dentists May See First Signs of Acid Reflux

Enamel loss may indicate disease in those lacking symptoms

Oak Brook, Ill. (September XX, 2009) – Everyone knows that painful burning sensation radiating from inside the chest—heartburn. Persistent symptoms, more than twice weekly, may be a sign of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, or GERD. But not everyone with GERD suffers from heartburn. In fact, you may have GERD and not even know it.

Commonly called acid reflux, the condition is caused when the esophageal sphincter, which separates the stomach from the esophagus, allows acid to seep out of the stomach. Many times this acid causes heartburn, but not always. In the absence of heartburn symptoms, sometimes the first indication that an individual suffers from GERD is the erosion of the hard enamel surface covering the back teeth or molars.

“Stomach acid can eat away at the enamel on your teeth,” said Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Your dentist may be the first to notice symptoms of the disease when he or she detects enamel loss.”

If detected, your dentist may refer you to a specialist, who may prescribe treatment or recommend lifestyle changes, such as avoiding acidic foods.

Left untreated, GERD can do long-term damage to your body. Loss of enamel is permanent, and if left unchecked, may lead to the rapid decay of affected teeth. And prolonged exposure to stomach acid can irritate and inflame your esophagus and may even lead to esophageal cancer.¹

That's why getting a regular oral exam from a dentist is so important—your dentist may find early symptoms of a potentially serious problem such as GERD. In fact, more than 90 percent of systemic diseases have oral manifestations that may be detected during an oral exam.² That includes diabetes, leukemia, cancer, heart disease, kidney disease and stroke.

“Dental care is an important part of overall health care,” said Anderson. “A growing body of evidence shows that quality oral health care can improve overall health.”

The not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association (www.deltadental.com) based in Oak Brook, Ill., is the leading national network of 39 independent dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 54 million Americans in more than 89,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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¹American Cancer Society “Suffering from Heartburn? Severe Heartburn Could Be Esophageal Cancer Risk Factor” http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS_1_1x_Suffering_from_Heartburn_.asp.

²Academy of General Dentistry’s *Know Your Teeth*, October 2008.