

Brush Up on Dental Health

Overview:

There is a clear connection between good oral health and good overall health. Serious dental and gum conditions impact many Americans, with about 3.7 million BCBS members affected in 2016. BCBS members with serious dental and gum conditions are more likely to have other serious health conditions, emergency room visits or inpatient hospital stays, and higher average annual healthcare costs. Further, heart health is strongly tied to oral health, as those with dental or gum conditions may also be diagnosed with a cardiac-related condition.¹ Understanding and managing oral health is important to maintaining overall health and wellness.

Specific Findings:

- The disabling effects of serious dental and gum conditions can lead to 1.7 years of healthy life lost, based on the Blue Cross Blue Shield Health Index.²
- Serious dental and gum problems are often associated with other serious health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, anemia, autoimmune disorders, gastro-intestinal disorders and renal disease.
 - BCBS members with serious dental and gum problems are 50 percent more likely to suffer from coronary artery disease and nearly 40 percent more likely to suffer from heart failure.
- BCBS members diagnosed with serious dental and gum conditions are twice as likely to visit the emergency room or have a hospital stay.
- Annual healthcare costs are more than twice as high for BCBS members with serious dental and gum conditions than for those without serious oral health conditions.

Method: Dental and gum problems were identified using the breadth and depth of data available through the Blue Cross Blue Shield Health Index by specifying conditions relating to oral health or disorders of the mouth.³ Serious dental and gum conditions include tooth loss, tooth and mouth infections, root canals and gum disease, including periodontitis and gingivitis. These categories affected about 3.7 million BCBS members in 2016. The population with adverse oral health conditions was compared to the population without an oral health condition to measure the relationship between oral health and overall health.

¹ For more information on the link between dental and heart health, see:

<https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/index.html>; and <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/h/heart-disease-and-oral-health>.

² For more information, see: <https://www.bcbs.com/the-health-of-america/health-index>

³ Powered by blinded claims data from more than 41 million BCBS commercially insured members per year from birth to age 64, this extensive resource brings an unmatched contribution to other available health by identifying more than 200 health conditions and quantifies how each condition affects Americans' health, life expectancy and well-being.

Years of Healthy Life Lost:

In 2016, about 3.7 million BCBS members had some type of serious dental or gum condition. BCBS members with a dental or gum condition had a lower Health Index compared to those who did not have an oral health condition.⁴ The disabling effects of serious dental and gum conditions can lead to 1.7 years of healthy life lost.

BCBS members – 2016	Health Index	Average Years of Healthy Life Lost
Have a Serious Oral Health Condition	0.875	4.4 Years
Have No Oral Health Conditions	0.916	2.7 Years

Connection to Cardiovascular Disease:

Oral health is commonly linked to cardio-related conditions, including coronary artery disease, valve dysfunction and heart failure. When compared to BCBS members without oral health conditions, those with dental and gum problems are 50 percent more likely to suffer from coronary artery disease and nearly 40 percent more likely to suffer from heart failure.

BCBS members – 2016	Prevalence: Coronary Artery Disease (% difference)	Prevalence: Valve Dysfunction (% difference)	Prevalence: Heart Failure (% difference)	Prevalence: All Cardiovascular Disease (% difference)
Have a Serious Oral Health Condition	6.0% (+50%)	5.2% (+63%)	1.8% (+38%)	37.0% (+27%)
Have No Oral Health Conditions	4.0%	3.2%	1.3%	29.1%

⁴ The BCBS Health Index assigns defined populations in the United States a health index score between 0 and 1, where 1 represents optimal health and anything less than 1 represents the adverse impact of illness or disease on longevity and quality of life.

Relationship to Other Serious Health Conditions:

Oral health conditions are also associated with other serious health conditions including autoimmune disorders, anemia, renal disease and gastro-intestinal disorders. In 2016, BCBS members with serious dental and gum conditions were more likely to also suffer from these other health conditions than those who did not have an oral health condition. For example, these people were twice as likely to suffer from autoimmune disease.

BCBS members – 2016	Prevalence: Autoimmune Disease (% difference)	Prevalence: Anemia (% difference)	Prevalence: Renal Failure (% difference)	Prevalence: Lower Gastro-Intestinal Disorder (% difference)
Have a Serious Oral Health Condition	1.6% (+129%)	6.0% (+ 67%)	2.2% (+47%)	5.9% (+46%)
Have No Oral Health Conditions	0.7%	3.6%	1.5%	3.2%

Emergency Room Visits and Hospital Care:

BCBS members with serious oral health conditions are, on average, twice as likely to visit the emergency room or have a hospital stay compared to those without dental problems. In 2016, the average cost of care in these healthcare service sites is higher for BCBS members affected by adverse dental and gum conditions (\$2,561 compared to \$1,030).

BCBS members – 2016	ER Visit /Inpatient Stays	Average Cost for ER Visits/IP Stays (% difference)
Have a Serious Oral Health Condition	0.6 per member	\$2,561 (+149%)
Have No Oral Health Conditions	0.3 per member	\$1,030

Overall Healthcare Costs:

In 2016, average overall healthcare costs were more than twice as high for BCBS members with serious dental and gum conditions than those without (\$8,858 compared to \$4,095).

BCBS members – 2016	Average Cost for All Care (% difference)
Have a Serious Oral Health Condition	\$8,858 (+116%)
Have No Oral Health Conditions	\$4,095

Conclusion:

In general, there is a link between good oral health and good overall health. Dental and gum conditions are often associated with other serious health conditions, especially cardiac-related diseases. Taking care of teeth, mouth and gums is an important component to help support a healthy life.