

Really?

THE CLAIM

Gum disease is linked to an increased risk of pancreatic cancer.

THE FACTS

Pancreatic cancer, a leading cause of cancer deaths, is elusive, with vague symptoms that often lead to late diagnosis. Because it is so lethal and hard to detect until its advanced stages, scientists have been looking for ways to spot it early. Now some researchers, including a team at Brown University, think gum disease may one day help identify people at greater risk.

Gum disease, which affects nearly half of all Americans, has been linked to stroke, diabetes and other ailments. The American Heart Association has disputed the notion that the association is causal, but some researchers speculate that poor gum health may give rise to chronic inflammation that promotes the growth of cancer cells.

In a recent study published in the journal *Gut*, the Brown researchers compared 405 people with pancreatic cancer and 416 who did not have the disease. The scientists found that higher levels of antibodies to *P. gingivalis*, a bacterium that plays a role in gum disease, were twice as common in people with pancreatic cancer.

To be sure, the research showed only an association, not a causal relationship. But other studies have also found intriguing results. One at Harvard found that men with poor gum health had a 63 percent higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer than men who did not have gum disease. And a New York University study found that high levels of *P. gingivalis* were linked to greater risk of dying of pancreatic and colorectal cancer, even in people without overt gum disease.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A few studies have suggested a possible link between gum disease and pancreatic cancer, though more research is needed.

ANAHAD O'CONNOR
scitimes@nytimes.com