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### **Diet Changes Because of Tooth Loss Could Lead to Heart Risk**

CHICAGO, September 10, 2003 -- Changes in diet because of tooth loss could increase the risk of developing chronic ailments, including cardiovascular disease, according to a study in this month's *Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)*.

In the study, researchers assessed the relationship between tooth loss and changes in diet over an eight-year period among 31,813 male health professionals. They focused on consumption of specific foods and nutrients associated with cardiovascular and other systemic diseases. These included fruits, vegetables, certain vitamins, fiber, cholesterol and specific types of fats.

“The results of this study support the detrimental impact of tooth loss on dietary intake,” the Harvard University researchers concluded. “Our results suggest that changes in diet owing to tooth loss could contribute to an increased risk of chronic disease that has been associated with poor dentition.”

During the study period from 1986 to 1994, 78.3 percent of the men did not lose teeth, 18.8 percent lost one to four teeth, and 2.8 percent lost five or more teeth.

In general, the researchers reported that study participants changed their diet in a healthier manner over the eight years. They reduced their consumption of saturated fat and cholesterol, and increased their consumption of most beneficial nutrients and fruits and vegetables.

However, according to the study, the dietary change of men who lost five or more teeth was unhealthier than that of men who lost no teeth.

For example, men who lost five or more teeth had a greater reduction in intake of vitamin E, a significantly smaller reduction in consumption of dietary cholesterol and a smaller increase in their intake of dietary fiber and whole fruits than those who did not lose any teeth.

In contrast, men without tooth loss had greater reductions in daily dietary intake of saturated fat and cholesterol. They also had greater increases in dietary fiber, carotene and fruits compared with men who lost teeth.

Researchers also found that men who lost more teeth were more likely to stop eating hard-to-chew foods such as apples, pears and raw carrots while they maintained similar or increased consumption of soft foods such as bananas, cantaloupes and cooked carrots.

## **Q & A:**

### **Isn't tooth loss inevitable in the later years?**

No! Today, older adults are keeping their natural teeth longer because of scientific developments and the preventive emphasis in dentistry. This improvement was seen in the results of a survey released by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. They showed that among persons aged 55 to 64, the rate of toothlessness dropped 60 percent since 1960.

Good oral hygiene and regular dental care are important throughout your life, whatever your age. By practicing good oral hygiene at home and visiting your dentist regularly, you will prevent dental problems and save time and money as well. In the process, you can save your teeth and gums.

### **At my age, why should I bother with oral hygiene, such as brushing and flossing?**

Thorough daily brushing and flossing of your natural teeth are essential to keep them in good condition—especially as you age. Plaque, the sticky, colorless layer of bacteria that causes tooth decay and gum disease (periodontal disease), can build up quickly on the teeth of older adults, particularly when they neglect oral hygiene. This can increase your risk for tooth decay and periodontal disease.

A few simple steps can help you maintain good oral health throughout your life. Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, and clean between your teeth daily with floss or interdental cleaners. Choose products that carry the ADA Seal of Acceptance, your assurance that the products have met the ADA's standards for safety and effectiveness. Be sure to see your dentist regularly for exams and professional teeth cleaning.