

The Oral Microbiome: Why It Matters

Your mouth is home to an entire ecosystem—and its balance matters.

The mouth is home to one of the most diverse microbial communities in the human body. Hundreds of species of bacteria, along with fungi, viruses, and other microorganisms, live on our teeth, gums, tongue, and oral tissues. Together, they form the oral microbiome.

AN ECOSYSTEM, NOT AN ENEMY

For decades, we tended to think about oral bacteria in fairly simple terms: bacteria = bad. Kill the bacteria.

We now understand that it's much more nuanced.

A healthy mouth contains a diverse community of microorganisms living together in relative balance. Some help maintain a healthy environment, while others have the potential to contribute to cavities, gum disease, inflammation, and infection when conditions allow them to become dominant.

The goal, therefore, isn't a sterile mouth.

It's a balanced one.

BALANCE

The environment can change the microbiome.

Diet, oral hygiene, dry mouth, smoking, medications, saliva, pH, inflammation, and other factors can change the environment inside the mouth.

When that environment changes, the microbial community can change with it. This disruption in microbial balance is often referred to as **dysbiosis**.

Rather than thinking only about which bacteria are present, functional dentistry also considers the environment that may be allowing certain organisms to thrive.



DIET

ORAL
HYGIENE

DRY MOUTH



MEDICATIONS



pH



INFLAMMATION



SMOKING



SLEEP



STRESS

YOUR MOUTH IS A GATEWAY

The oral microbiome doesn't exist in isolation.

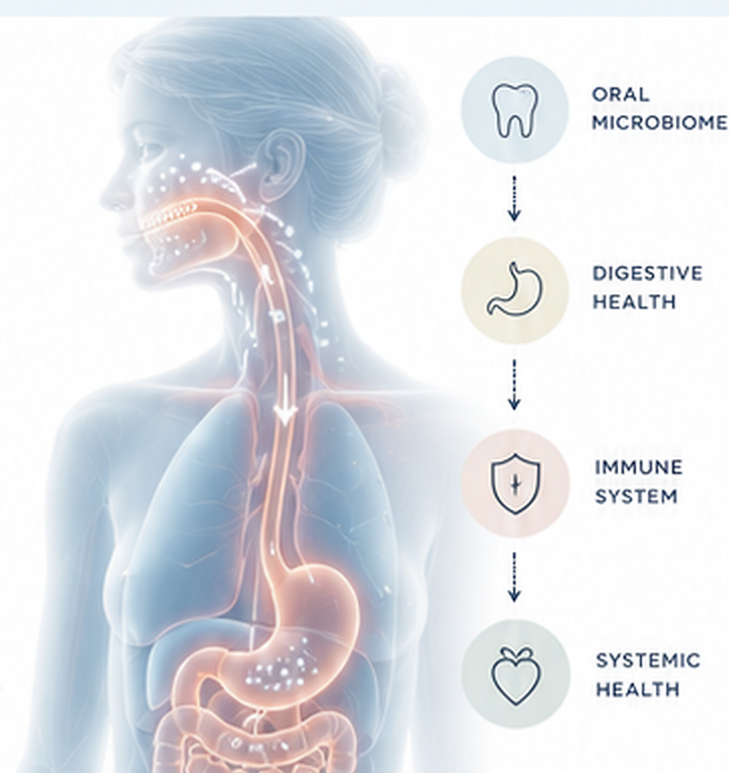
We swallow thousands of times each day, continually exposing the digestive tract to microorganisms and substances from the mouth. Oral bacteria and inflammatory products can also interact with tissues and, under certain circumstances, enter the bloodstream.

Research continues to investigate associations between oral dysbiosis and conditions beyond the mouth, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, inflammatory conditions, and other aspects of systemic health.

That doesn't mean an oral bacterium causes every condition it's associated with. The relationship is far more complex.

But it does reinforce something important:

Oral health and systemic health are connected.



LOOKING BEYOND PLAQUE

Traditional dental examinations give us valuable information about cavities, gum health, bone levels, plaque, bleeding, and other signs of disease. But sometimes we want to understand more about the biology behind what we're seeing.

In selected patients, oral microbiome testing can provide additional information about the microbial community in the mouth and identify organisms associated with periodontal disease or other oral conditions. It is one piece of information—not a diagnosis by itself—but it can help us build a more complete picture alongside the patient's examination, history, imaging, and other clinical findings.

FEED THE ECOSYSTEM, NOT JUST THE TEETH

Brushing and flossing remain fundamental. But supporting a healthy oral microbiome involves more than simply trying to kill as many bacteria as possible.

Saliva, nutrition, hydration, oral hygiene, nasal breathing, smoking, medications, pH, and the products we routinely put into our mouths can all influence the oral environment.

At Functional Dentistry, we're interested not only in removing disease, but in creating an oral environment that supports health.

Because sometimes the question isn't simply:

“How do we get rid of the bacteria?”

It's:

“Why are these bacteria thriving here in the first place?”