



Periodontal Disease: The Genetic Link

Periodontal disease is a bacterial infection that affects the gums, teeth and jaw bone, and is the leading cause of tooth loss. Of the hundreds of types of bacteria that normally live in the mouth, 11 types are most associated with periodontal disease. The bacteria that cause periodontal infection can enter the bloodstream and damage distant organs in the body such as the heart and brain. Pregnant women have the added risk of low birth weight babies as well. Left untreated, periodontal disease can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.

Until recently, methods for diagnosing periodontal disease have changed little, and while some advances in the treatment of periodontal diseases have been developed, nothing in my opinion rivals the introduction of two new diagnostic tests, MICRO-IDENT® and GENOTYPE PST®.

Developed in Germany and now available in this country, these tests are non-invasive, and painless. And because they are often reimbursable by medical or dental insurance, these tests are cost effective too. The MICRO-IDENT test identifies the 11 types of bacteria typically associated with periodontal disease and determines which bacteria are present by probing the bacterial DNA in the sample collected from your mouth. The sample is collected by placing a small strip of absorbent paper along the gumline and collecting the fluid that is normally secreted. Based on the results, appropriate therapy can be initiated.

GENOTYPE-PST examines your DNA for genetic risk factors associated with periodontal disease. This test is performed by rubbing a foam swab against the inside of the cheek for a few seconds to collect some of the surface skin cells. Understanding your individual genetically determined risk for periodontal disease can lead to better long term results if treatment is needed.

Together, these tests represent significant advancements in our understanding of the causes of periodontal disease and the role of individual genetics in determining the course periodontal disease may take in a case by case basis. Ultimately, our new and advanced diagnostic capabilities allow us to treat periodontal disease more conservatively and more effectively.

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