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The health risks of obesity are staggering, and obesity is considered to be an ongoing epidemic in the United States, with more than 31% of the population classified as obese. A study published in the Journal of Dental Research suggests that there may be a close link between oral bacteria and the development of obesity.

Studying Obesity and Oral Health

The study was performed with the help of 313 women classified as overweight, where they maintained a body mass index (BMI) between 27 and 32. In the study, researchers compared the saliva of overweight women to the saliva of over 230 healthy individuals from studies surrounding periodontal disease. When comparing the results, researchers discovered that *Selenomonas noxia*, a single bacteria species, was found in 98.4% of overweight subjects. This bacteria is believed to serve as a biological indicator of a developing overweight condition, showing a link between oral health and obesity.

What Causes Oral Bacteria?

In order to prevent or at least control obesity, we often refer patients to lifestyle changes that include dietary changes, or the food that is eaten. It's believed that foods with a high glycemic index can lead to obesity if not properly moderated or eliminated from the diet. Those same foods can also contribute to the growth of bacteria, showing us another link between obesity and oral health. Fermentable carbohydrates such as refined flour, rice, potatoes, and pasta all convert into simple sugars when eaten. These are just a few of the foods that are believed to contribute to weight gain that leads to obesity. These same sugars convert readily into plaque when they're not removed from the mouth. As that plaque begins to accumulate on the surface of our teeth and along the gum line, the risks of variable oral problems begin to steadily increase. That includes gum disease, gingivitis and periodontitis as well as tooth decay.

How Diet can Improve Oral Health

There are some viewpoints that would suggest fermentable carbohydrates are essential to a proper diet. However, there is a great deal of evidence showing that modifying a diet to one that focuses more on foods with a low glycemic index is not only beneficial in reducing weight gain and controlling obesity, it also contributes to better oral health. Our teeth and gums are just as important as our waistline, and regulating our diets is one way that we can improve the overall health of our bodies. To supplement those efforts and reduce the health risks of obesity such as those revealed in this study, it's important to equip ourselves with the right knowledge and resources to care for our teeth. With such strong connections between our overall health and our mouth, there is a need to reaffirm the importance of regular dental examinations and meticulous dental hygiene that includes brushing with a brushless toothbrush, regular flossing and improving our diets to keep tooth enamel and our gum tissue healthy - essentially free of bad oral bacteria.

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