

Branding Periodontal Health – Supporting a Healthy Lifestyle

In recent decades, our perception of the quality of life has changed. More and more people are deciding to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Since the 1950s, sociologists have been discussing 'lifestyle', described as a way or style of living.¹

The term 'lifestyle' reflects people's self-image or self-concept, the way they see themselves and believe they are seen by the others.

One's lifestyle can be healthy or unhealthy based on food choices, activity level and behaviour. Adopting a positive lifestyle is correlated with happiness, reduced risk of many illnesses such as metabolic diseases, joint and skeletal problems, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, overweight etc, while a negative lifestyle can lead to sadness, illness and depression. According to the WHO, 60% of related factors to individual health and quality of life are correlated to lifestyle.²

Gingivitis has been reported to affect up to 95% of the population and chronic periodontitis up to 65% of the North American population aged 65 years and older.^{3,4}

Periodontal diseases are a chronic inflammatory response to the presence of bacterial challenge. Patients with advanced periodontitis are at greater risk of suffering from diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain adverse pregnancy effects, among other things.⁵

Despite the extensive spread of the disease and its correlation with impaired general health, there is only limited awareness of and demand for periodontal care and maintenance in the general population.

The quest for youth and health drives people of all ages to adopt every fad that comes along that relates to diets and athletic activities, even if it involves financial and physical efforts. But when it comes to periodontal treatment, we, as dental professionals, fail to attract our patients' attention.

Can we do it differently? Can we change patients' perspectives of periodontal treatment to the point that it will be desired instead of avoided?

Dentists and periodontists constantly describe periodontal problems, calling attention to all periodontal disease-related systemic complications. This only reinforces the resentment and fear patients already have about dental and periodontal treatment. But what if we focus on periodontal health and its benefits for keeping our natural teeth and facial aesthetics as well as promoting general health? These are motivating factors relating to the social desire to have a healthy life. In our constant efforts to promote awareness of periodontal health, when launching a periodontal 'campaign', we should consider the interests and desires of our target group, and promote periodontal health as one of the crucial components defining lifestyle and health.

Lifestyle brands seek to inspire, guide, and motivate people, with the goal of their products being to suit the definition of the consumer's way of life. We should market 'periodontology' in this spirit.

A 1998 issue of the 'Journal of the American Medical Association' on behavioural medicine revealed that medical triggers tend to promote long-term behavioural change. We should follow this line, encouraging our patients to take a proactive stance toward achieving a healthier lifestyle by attaining and maintaining periodontal health. Emphasis must be placed on the importance of keeping periodontal health, not only to avoid the medical consequences associated with a negative lifestyle, but also to keep a healthy and therefore young smile and function. We need to attribute to 'periodontology' a set of traits to which the patients, our 'consumers', can relate.

As epidemiological studies indicate, periodontal care should be provided to the vast majority of the population, in all age groups and both genders. We will more successfully deliver the message by focussing on periodontal health instead of periodontal disease, emphasising the benefits of keeping a healthy periodontium, instead of the consequences of periodontal breakdown. In other words, we should change the tune by offering accessibility to periodontal support for an improved lifestyle, rather than periodontal treatment for a diseased mouth.

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