

Poor oral health may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer among African American women

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African American women with poor oral health may be more likely to get pancreatic cancer (PC).

In the U.S., studies show that African Americans are more likely to get [pancreatic cancer](#) than Caucasians. Poor oral health, specifically adult tooth loss and periodontal disease prevalence, has a similar pattern. Using data from the Black Women's Health Study, researchers from the Slone Epidemiology Center at Boston University found that compared to African American women who showed no signs of poor oral health, those who reported adult tooth loss had a substantially increased risk of PC. This association became even stronger for those who had lost at least five teeth.

According to the researchers, these observations may be related to oral bacteria and the inflammation caused by certain bacteria. In previous studies among different populations the presence of circulating antibodies to selected oral periodontal pathogens was associated with increased risk of PC.

"Oral health is a modifiable factor. Apart from avoiding cigarette smoking, there is little an individual can do to reduce risk of PC. Improving access to low cost, high quality dental care for all Americans may decrease racial disparities in this cancer," said Julie Palmer, ScD, associate director of BU's Slone Epidemiology Center and a professor of epidemiology at BUSPH.

These findings appear online in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*.

Provided by Boston University School of Medicine
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