

“Tiredness was

For Erika Nunziato each day was more exhausting than the next—until a visit to the dentist turned her life around

“The Energizer Bunny—that’s what people used to call me before my life started to fall apart,” says Erika, 58, a recent retiree and mom to a grown son. “But then about three years ago, I just crashed. I remember being at the mall with my husband, Bruce, and feeling too tired to walk from store to store. I had to sit down for a ‘two-minute recharge,’ but 15 minutes later I still couldn’t get up. It took all my energy to drag myself to my feet and get to the car so I could go home and rest.

“Situations like that became so common that I just stopped doing things altogether. Though I’d always been bubbly and social, I found myself turning down invitations from family and friends because I preferred to sleep. If I didn’t have to get off the couch, I’d stay there for hours.

“At times I didn’t even recognize myself. My days of fastidious house-keeping were gone: I only cleaned when it was an absolute necessity, and even then I mostly just stuffed any mess into the tub and pulled the shower curtain closed. I was accomplishing only a third of what I wanted to do each day.

“Even my beloved sewing—a long-time hobby I’d hoped to expand into a home-based business—was falling by the wayside. More than once I nodded off at my sewing machine with my upper body slumped over the top and the motor still running.

Barely getting by

“Fatigue was just part of the problem. I also experienced achy joints, a vague feverish feeling and tender sore gums that bled when I brushed my teeth.

“To restore my health, I tried vitamins, essential oils and energy drinks, which helped a little bit but not enough.

“I figured maybe I was just getting old and was supposed to feel like this. I wondered if my best years were behind me.”

—Erika Nunziato, Berkeley, IL



One-minute QUIZ **COULD GINGIVITIS BE THE CAUSE OF YOUR FATIGUE?**

Even if your gums don’t bleed, you could suffer from gingivitis. If you’re extremely fatigued and have at least two of the following, ask your dentist for a CRP test.

- ✓ One or more teeth that move (but may not be painful) when you press against them
- ✓ Chronic aches such as head, jaw, joint or muscle pain
- ✓ Brain fog/trouble with memory or concentration
- ✓ High cholesterol or blood sugar

NEWS!

68% of American women have silent gum inflammation

sidelining my dreams”

It was like putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg. My doctor wanted me to take antidepressants or menopausal hormone therapy, but I wanted to avoid a pharmaceutical fix.

“My family was extremely supportive and accepted my low energy and aches and pains, but I hated it! I wondered, *Is this how it feels to get older? Are my best years behind me?*”

“When I described my health problems to my friend Karen, she told me she’d experienced many of the same symptoms, and that she had improved dramatically after following her dentist’s advice. I couldn’t help thinking, *You’ve got to be kidding me. There’s no way my teeth and gums are making me feel tired and achy.* I grudgingly agreed to see a dentist since I hadn’t gone in years, but in all honesty I thought Karen was a little nuts.

Living life to the fullest

“I had a change of heart after visiting a dentist in Chicago named Ron Schefdore, D.M.D., founder of the national Healthy Heart Dentistry program. He explained that poor gum

health can cause body-wide inflammation, which can lead to fatigue and achy joints. He administered a simple CRP test to measure inflammation, which confirmed his diagnosis of gingivitis.

“Dr. Schefdore gave my teeth a deep cleaning and recommended that I get follow-up cleanings every six months. I also began using a gum brush and Rotapoint [a pick-type flosser] and taking supplements containing the inflammation-fighting nutrient CoQ10 and vitamins C and D. I had a hard time believing this simple regimen was all I needed to feel well again, but within three weeks my achy joints and other symptoms were on their way out, and I had enough energy for visiting with family and friends, volunteering, cleaning the house and sewing up a storm.

“My dream of having my own business creating novelty clothing for pets and therapy dogs has taken off. I am selling out at craft shows and I’m considering creating a website. Turning my health around really was as simple as paying a bit more attention to my gums. The Energizer Bunny is back!”

—as told to Hallie Potocki

Alert!

READ THIS BEFORE YOUR NEXT CUP OF TEA

Experts are warning that Americans are overdosing on fluoride, a trace mineral found in oral-care products, drinking water and increasingly in our food supply (due to water fluoridation). The problem: “Most of us are consuming excess fluoride from a very young age,” says Richard L. Shames, M.D., coauthor of *Thyroid Power* (HarperCollins). Over time, fluoride can build in the body and supplant iodine in the thyroid. “This makes the thyroid sluggish, causing fatigue, weight gain and poor immunity.” While switching to fluoride-free dental products can help, experts also advise using caution with tea—its leaves absorb more fluoride from soil than any other edible plant. The fix: Brew with nonfluoridated water and favor herbal tea, which has 30 times less fluoride than regular tea.



Main photo: Media Bakery. Inset: courtesy of Erika Nunziato. Still: iStockphoto. Science text: Olga Norstrom-Ojeda.

Despite how common gingivitis is, many people don’t realize they are affected. The reason: Gum bleeding and tenderness aren’t a given. “Initially there might be light bleeding, but if the infection isn’t treated, gums give up and stop bleeding,” says Shehzad Sheikh, D.M.D., of Dominion Dental Care in Sterling, Virginia. “Gums might even look healed, but infection still rages under the surface.”

The bacteria move deeper into gums and vascularized bones around teeth, gaining access to circulating blood. This may explain why gum inflammation is linked with body-wide inflammatory conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and chronic pain.

WHAT CAN HELP

In addition to brushing and flossing, consider taking the following:

VITAMIN D. Studies link higher blood levels of this nutrient with lower risk of gum inflammation. “Vitamin D strengthens the bony support of teeth, protecting against infection,” says Dr. Sheikh. The proven dose: 1,000 IU daily, though D experts say 2,000 IU daily is optimal. One to try: Nature Made D 1,000 IU, \$13 for 200 tablets, at drugstores.

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS. People who consume fish oil regularly have a 20 percent lower risk of developing gum infection, report researchers at Harvard Medical School. They credit the anti-inflammatory properties of the oil’s healthy fats. Aim for three weekly 3 oz. servings of tuna, salmon or sardines, or try a supplement like Carlson Super Omega-3 Fish Oil Concentrate 1,000 mg (\$12 for 130 softgels, at VitaminShoppe.com).