

Editorial

Tooth loss and dementia: Is there an association between them?

Cognitive impairment is a feature frequently found in elderly patients. This problem is characterized by dementia and might originate from vascular disease, as ischemic stroke, or from Alzheimer's disease [10]. Recently, some studies have sought to relate the tooth loss with the impairment of cognition [1, 10].

Three main hypotheses were formulated to explain this. The first hypothesis claims that tooth loss reduces masticatory function, which in turn negatively affects the stimuli to brain activity and may lead to dementia [2]. The second, associates the systemic inflammation caused by periodontal disease with the brain function and dementia [1]. Other possible pathway would be the influence of tooth loss on the nutrition status, once the absence of some nutrients intake may lead to cognition impairment [6, 7]. However, it is not yet certain that tooth loss can cause dementia, and the real cause of cognitive impairment is still uncertain [11].

Some recent clinical studies showed a direct association between tooth loss and the higher risk of develop dementia, including Alzheimer's disease and ischemic stroke [10, 12]. However, there are other authors stating that this association is still inconclusive [9]. The same contradiction can be seen in experimental studies, with some authors linking oral status with dementia [3] and others stating that tooth loss has not a causal effect on cognitive impairment [4].

A certainty is that cognitive impairment affects the overall health of the patient, including oral health deterioration [5]. Once the population, in general, is becoming older, this issue shows the importance of oral health management on the cognitive status of elderly patients. Thus, the role of the general dentist is to avoid tooth loss and promote oral health, in seeking to improve the quality of life of elderly patient.

References

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