According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 20 percent of the population will have dementia by 2030. This indicates an increased need for research and education to identify modifiable risk factors that could aid in the prevention or progression of dementia. Dementia is one of the leading forms of cognitive decline, affecting an individual’s memory, spatial learning, and problem-solving abilities. Though the cause of dementia is multifactorial, a recent discovery shows a correlation between tooth loss and cognitive decline, which ultimately decreases brain stimulation.

A chronic state of stress in the brain limits adequate brain function, resulting in dementia. Recent studies have shown the act of mastication lowers the brain’s state of stress by sending nerve impulses to eliminate stress hormones. In individuals with masticatory dysfunction, the nerve impulses that are normally present in mastication are absent, which contributes to the decline of brain function.

Impaired mastication also places the patient at a risk for decreased nutritional status, which is another factor correlated with dementia. Tooth replacement and frequent dental visits, even for edentulous patients, can help prevent or slow the onset of this debilitating disease. Our call to action as dental hygienists is to instruct our patients on the importance of maintaining their natural dentitions as long as possible and to inform our patients on tooth replacement options. Dementia is more likely to occur in patients that do not replace missing teeth due to a lack of hippocampus stimulation.
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