

Walking really does your body good from head to toe. Not only will it help keep your legs strong and your waist trim, but it may protect your pearly whites, too. It all has to do with the aerobic fitness benefits that walking confers. In a recent Japanese study, the folks who were the fittest were also the least likely to have severe periodontitis, a form of gum disease. Being both fit and slim is even better for your teeth. In the study, participants with a healthy body mass index (BMI) as well as a high capacity for aerobic endurance had the lowest odds of gum troubles. It's just one more great reason to add a calorie-burning daily walk to your oral-care regimen. You'll make your doctor and your dentist proud. Axing Inflammation How, exactly, does breaking a sweat keep your mouth healthy? Well for one, researchers believe that exercise helps quiet inflammation throughout the body, and that's a good thing because inflammation is one of those potential triggers for disease, including gum disease. Physical activity may also help keep blood levels of C-reactive protein in check -- another happy outcome because this compound may play a role in the origins of gum disease. (*Real Age*)

DID YOU KNOW that research reveals that regular activity can speed the healing process by as much as 25%? Ohio State University scientists delivered a small puncture wound to 28 sedentary men and women ages 55 to 77. They then asked half of the group to exercise on a treadmill, ride a stationary bike, and strength train three times a week, 1 hour per session, for 3 months, while the other half stayed inactive. In the end, the skin wounds healed an average of 10 days faster (29 days versus 39 days) in those who exercised than in those who didn't. "Exercise increases circulation and helps regulate the immune system and hormones that influence the healing process," says study author Charles Emery, PhD. Though he studied only healthy volunteers, Emery is optimistic that exercise may also accelerate wound closure in people who are traditionally slow to heal, such as those with diabetes. (*Prevention*)