

Gum Disease

If you have been told you have periodontal (gum) disease, you're not alone. Many adults currently have some form of the disease. Periodontal diseases range from simple gum inflammation to serious disease that results in major damage to the soft tissue and bone that support the teeth. In the worst cases, teeth become wobbly and may be lost

Whether your gum disease is stopped, slowed, or gets worse depends a great deal on how well you care for your teeth and gums every day, from this point forward. We encourage use of a good electric toothbrush and visiting your dentist/hygienist regularly.

What causes gum disease?

Our mouths are full of bacteria. These bacteria, along with mucus and other particles, constantly form a sticky, colourless "plaque" on teeth. Brushing and flossing help get rid of plaque. Plaque that is not removed can harden and form "tartar" that brushing doesn't clean. Only a professional cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist can remove tartar. Plaque is full of bacteria, and some of those bacteria are nasty enough to inflame the gums and cause a chain of events to result in the bone under the gum to be lost.

Gingivitis

The longer plaque and tartar are on teeth, the more harmful they become. The bacteria cause inflammation of the gums that is called "gingivitis." In gingivitis, the gums become red, swollen and can bleed easily. Gingivitis is a mild form of gum disease that can usually be reversed with daily brushing and flossing, and regular cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist. This form of gum disease does not include any loss of bone and tissue that hold teeth in place.

Periodontitis

When gingivitis is not treated, it can advance to "periodontitis" (which means "inflammation around the tooth"). In periodontitis, gums pull away from the teeth and form spaces (called "pockets") that become infected. The body's immune system fights the bacteria as the plaque spreads and grows below the gum line. Bacterial toxins and the body's natural response to infection start to break down the bone and connective tissue that hold teeth in place. If not treated, the bones, gums, and tissue that support the teeth are destroyed. The teeth may eventually become loose, cause pain and have to be removed.

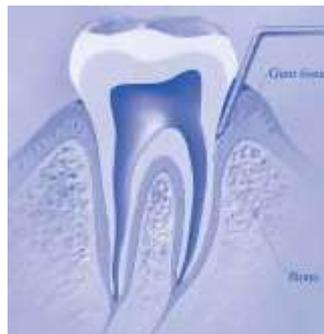
Risk Factors

- **Smoking.** Need another reason to quit smoking? Smoking is one of the most significant risk factors associated with the development of gum disease. Additionally, smoking can lower the chances for successful treatment.
- **Hormonal changes in girls/women.** These changes can make gums more sensitive and make it easier for gingivitis to develop.
- **Diabetes.** People with diabetes are at higher risk for developing infections, including gum disease.
- **Other illnesses and their treatments.** Diseases such as AIDS and its treatments can also negatively affect the health of gums, as can treatments for cancer.
- **Medications.** There are hundreds of prescription and over the counter medications that can reduce the flow of saliva, which has a protective effect on the mouth. Without enough saliva, the mouth is vulnerable to infections such as gum disease. And some medicines can cause abnormal overgrowth of the gum tissue; this can make it difficult to keep teeth and gums clean.
- **Genetic susceptibility.** Some people are more prone to severe gum disease than others.

How do I know if I have gum disease?

Symptoms of gum disease include:

- Bad breath that won't go away
- Red or swollen gums
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Painful chewing
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth
- Receding gums or longer appearing teeth



Any of these symptoms may be a sign of a serious problem, which should be checked by a dentist. At your dental visit the dentist or hygienist should:

- Ask about your medical history to identify underlying conditions or risk factors (such as smoking) that may contribute to gum disease.
- Examine your gums and note any signs of inflammation.
- Use a tiny ruler called a “probe” to check for and measure any pockets. In a healthy mouth, the depth of these pockets is usually between 1 and 3 millimeters. This test for pocket depth is usually painless.
- A BPE score of 0 is good, 1 (requires better brushing), 2 (professional tartar removal), 3 (early gum disease), 4 (advanced).

The dentist or hygienist may also:

- Take an x-ray to see whether there is any bone loss.



My Basic Periodontal Examination (BPE)

- 0** – No pockets, tartar or inflammation
- 1** – No pockets or tartar, but bleeding on probing
- 2** – No pockets, but tartar/overhangs present
- 3** – Some early pockets – possible early gum disease
- 4** – Deeper pockets – moderate or advanced gum disease

How is gum disease treated? See your dentist and hygienist regularly

The main goal of treatment is to control the infection. The number and types of treatment will vary, depending on the extent of the gum disease. Any type of treatment requires that the patient keep up good daily care at home. The doctor may also suggest changing certain behaviours, such as quitting smoking, as a way to improve treatment outcome.

Deep Cleaning (Scaling and Root Planing) – see your dentist and hygienist regularly

The dentist, or dental hygienist removes the plaque and tartar through a deep-cleaning method called scaling and root planing. Scaling means scraping off the tartar from above and below the gum line. Root planing gets rid of rough spots on the tooth root where the germs gather, and helps remove bacteria that contribute to the disease.

Medications

Medications may be used with treatment that includes scaling and root planning, but they cannot always take the place of treatment. Depending on how far the disease has progressed, the dentist may still suggest surgical treatment. Long-term studies are needed to find out if using medications reduces the need for surgery and whether they are effective over a long period of time.

Surgical Treatments

Flap Surgery. Surgery might be necessary if inflammation and deep pockets remain following treatment with deep cleaning and medications. A dentist or periodontist may perform flap surgery to remove tartar deposits in deep pockets or to reduce the periodontal pocket and make it easier for the patient, dentist, and hygienist to keep the area clean. This common surgery involves lifting back the gums and removing the tartar. The gums are then stitched back in place so that the tissue fits snugly around the tooth again. After surgery the gums will heal and fit more tightly around the tooth. This can result in the teeth appearing longer.

How can I keep my teeth and gums healthy? – Why not speak to our Hygienists?

- Brush your teeth twice a day (with a fluoride toothpaste).
- Floss regularly to remove plaque from between teeth. Or use a device such as a special brush or wooden or plastic pick recommended by a dental professional.
- Visit the dentist routinely for a check-up and book regular appointments with our hygienist to help maintain your gums
- Don't smoke