

Disease, Gum (Periodontal Disease)

Overview

Periodontal disease is an infection of the tissues that support your teeth. Your gum tissue is not attached to the teeth as high as it may seem. There is a very shallow v-shaped crevice called a sulcus between the tooth and gums. Periodontal diseases attack just below the gum line in the sulcus, where they cause the attachment of the tooth and its supporting tissues to break down. As the tissues are damaged, the sulcus develops into a pocket: generally, the more severe the disease, the greater the depth of the pocket.

Periodontal diseases are classified according to the severity of the disease. The two major stages are gingivitis and periodontitis. Gingivitis is a milder and reversible form of periodontal disease that only affects the gums. Gingivitis may lead to more serious, destructive forms of periodontal disease called periodontitis.

It is possible to have periodontal disease and have no warning signs. That is one reason why regular dental checkups and periodontal examinations are very important. Treatment methods depend upon the type of disease and how far the condition has progressed. Good oral hygiene at home is essential to help keep periodontal disease from becoming more serious or recurring. **You don't have to lose teeth to periodontal disease.** Brush, clean between your teeth, eat a balanced diet, and schedule regular dental visits for a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Some factors increase the risk of developing periodontal disease:

- Tobacco smoking or chewing
- Systemic diseases such as diabetes
- Some types of medication such as steroids, some types of anti-epilepsy drugs, cancer therapy drugs, some calcium channel blockers and oral contraceptives
- Bridges that no longer fit properly
- Crooked teeth
- Fillings that have become defective
- Pregnancy or use of oral contraceptives

Several warning signs that can signal a problem:

- Gums that bleed easily
- Red, swollen, tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste
- Permanent teeth that are loose or separating

- Any change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Any change in the fit of partial dentures

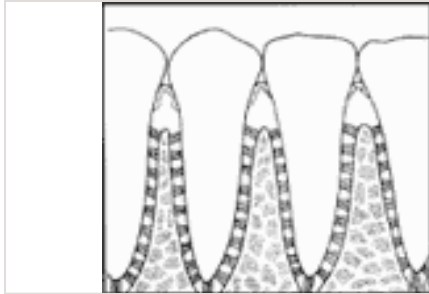
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- **What Is periodontal (gum) disease?**

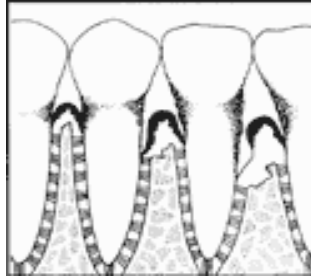
- Periodontal (gum) disease is an infection of the tissues surrounding and supporting the teeth. It is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Because periodontal (gum) disease is usually painless, however, you may not know you have it.
- Periodontal (gum) disease is caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. These bacteria create toxins that can damage the gums.
- In the early stage of periodontal (gum) disease, called gingivitis, the gums can become red, swollen and bleed easily. At this stage, the disease is still reversible and can usually be eliminated by daily brushing and flossing.
- In the more advanced stages of periodontal (gum) disease, called periodontitis, the gums and bone that support the teeth can become seriously damaged. The teeth can become loose, fall out or have to be removed by a dentist.

- **What are the signs of periodontal (gum) disease?**

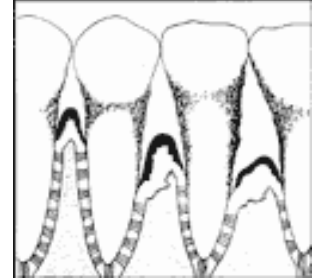
- If you notice any of the following signs of periodontal (gum) disease, see your dentist immediately:
- gums that bleed when you brush your teeth
- red, swollen or tender gums
- gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- bad breath that doesn't go away
- pus between your teeth and gums
- loose teeth
- a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- change in the fit of partial dentures
-



Normal, healthy gums Healthy gums and bone anchor teeth firmly in place.



Periodontitis
Unremoved, plaque hardens into calculus (tartar). As plaque and calculus continue to build up, the gums begin to recede (pull away) from the teeth, and pockets form between the teeth and gums.



Advanced periodontitis
The gums recede farther, destroying more bone and the periodontal ligament. Teeth — even healthy teeth — may become loose and need to be extracted.

- **How can I prevent periodontal (gum) disease?**

- The good news is that you can help prevent periodontal (gum) disease by taking good care of your teeth every day and having regular dental checkups. Here's how to keep your teeth and gums healthy:
- *Brush your teeth well twice a day.*
- This removes the film of bacteria from the teeth. Be sure to use a soft-bristled toothbrush that is in good condition. Toothpastes and mouth rinses containing fluoride strengthen the teeth and help prevent decay. Choose products that bear the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance, your assurance that they have met the ADA's standards for safety and effectiveness. The ADA reviews all advertising claims for any product bearing the Seal. The Seal on a product is an assurance for consumers and dentists against misleading or untrue statements concerning a product's safety and effectiveness.
- Clean between your teeth every day.
- Cleaning between your teeth with floss or interdental cleaners removes bacteria and food particles from between the teeth, where a toothbrush can't reach. Early periodontal (gum) disease can often be reversed by daily brushing and flossing. If you use interdental cleaners, ask your dentist how to use them properly, to avoid injuring your gums.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Choose a variety of foods from the basic food groups, such as breads, cereals and other grain products; fruits; vegetables; meat, poultry and fish; and dairy products, such as milk, cheese and yogurt. Limit between-meal snacks.

- Visit your dentist regularly. It is important to have regular dental checkups, and professional cleaning is essential to prevent periodontal diseases.