

What is Gum disease?

Gum disease is where soreness, swelling or infection of the gums around the teeth occurs. There are two main forms, gingivitis and periodontitis. These are serious infections that if left untreated can lead to tooth loss.

Gingivitis

Gingivitis is where the gums around the teeth become red, swollen and may bleed when brushed or flossing.

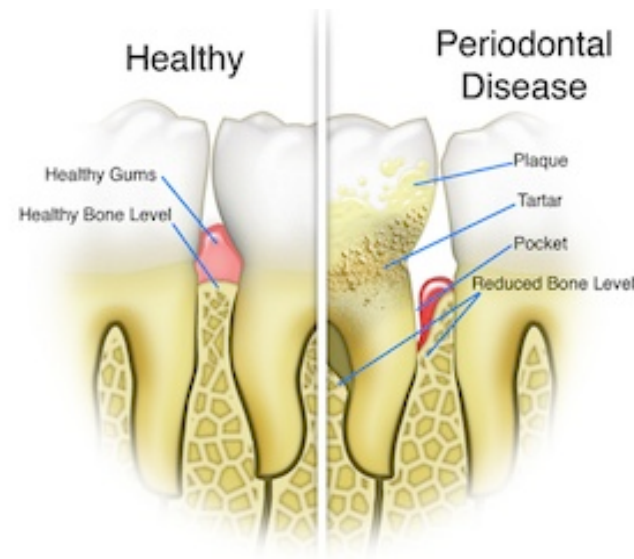
Periodontitis

Untreated gingivitis can develop into periodontitis. There are several types but all affect the amount of support the teeth have. As the disease gets worse the teeth may become loose because the bone that supports them is destroyed. It may lead to the need for affected teeth to be removed. Periodontal disease is a major cause of about 70% of tooth loss in adults.

What is the cause?

Plaque, a sticky film that forms on the teeth is the cause. This film contains many bacteria, some of which are associated with particular types of the disease. If the plaque is not removed, by brushing, flossing, it will form a hard yellowy material called calculus (or tartar). This will make the gums more tender and swollen and more

likely to bleed. These bacteria may release substances that destroy areas in the gums and bone creating pockets, which fill with even more bacteria. These pockets will get deeper and deeper until eventually the tooth becomes so loose that it requires extraction.



What are the signs?

Initially:

- Red swollen gums
- Gums that bleed easily when brushing
- Bad breath

Later:

- Sensitivity to hot and cold
- Persistent bad breath

- Teeth that have moved
- Loose teeth
- Pus from the gums

Why may I suffer?

Oral Hygiene – If gingivitis is not treated the plaque that causes it can spread to below the gums. If plaque is not removed and allowed to harden into calculus it becomes even harder to clean the teeth and the disease will quickly develop.

Smoking – Smoking is linked with many illnesses such as cancer, lung disease and heart disease, however it also is the biggest single factor in increasing your risk of getting periodontal disease. Additionally smoking may cause the disease to develop more quickly and for healing to be poor. Your treatment may include help in giving up smoking since this will increase greatly the chance of successful treatment.

Diabetes – Many people may have diabetes and not be aware of it. If you are a diabetic you are at a higher risk of developing infections such as periodontitis. Additionally the infection may be more severe than in someone without diabetes. It may be the case that if your dentist considers you to be at risk of having undiagnosed diabetes, a test may be done.

Stress – Stress is implicated in many health problems such as high blood pressure, however it can also affect your risk for periodontal disease since stress can make it more difficult for the body to fight off infection.

Pregnancy – During pregnancy changes in hormone levels can cause the gums to become more sensitive and bleed. This can make you more susceptible to gum disease. In addition it has been shown that patients with gum disease are more likely to have low birth weight babies.

Hereditary factors or genetics – A small proportion of people may be more susceptible to the disease. It may be important to identify these patients before the disease develops and ensure excellent hygiene. If members of your close family have suffered it may make you more likely to develop the disease. This risk can be eliminated though if hygiene is excellent with good home care and regular professional cleaning.

Dentures – Any denture or bridge will attract plaque. Thorough effective cleaning is needed to prevent the increased build up of plaque. In addition a badly fitting denture will attract more plaque and may damage the gums causing or making periodontal disease worse.

Medications – Some medicines for example heart medicines, drugs for epilepsy and the oral contraceptive have an

affect on the gums. These may be contributing to the problem.

Other diseases – Much more rarely periodontal disease may be caused by disease such as AIDS or leukaemia.

Diagnosis

Your dentist will initially make the diagnosis and advise what treatment is needed. This may involve checking what teeth are affected, taking X-rays and measuring the depth of the pockets around the teeth.

Treatment may involve several visits to a hygienist for thorough cleaning of the teeth and roots so that the gums can heal and become healthy again.

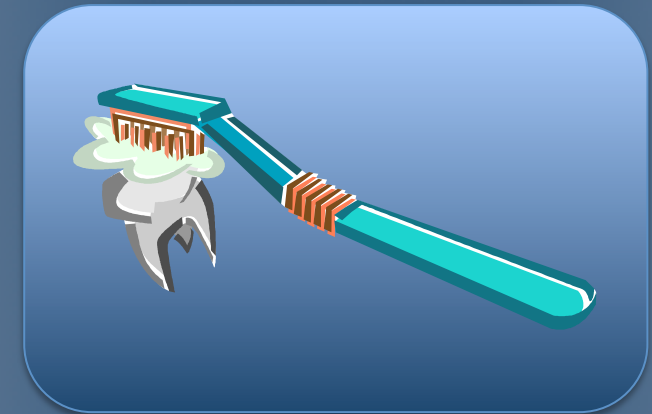
Will the disease come back?

Unfortunately it is unlikely that the disease will ever be completely cured, however, it may be slowed down to a rate that allows the teeth to be kept for life.

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