

PERIODONTAL (GUM) DISEASE

Periodontal disease or gum disease is the inflammation of the gums and the supporting structures which hold your teeth in place.

When the inflammation is simply in the gums it is called gingivitis, but once it involves the underlying supporting tissues it is called periodontitis.

This is the number one cause of tooth loss in adults; it is often symptomless, without causing any pain at all. In some cases the only thing you may notice is bleeding gums. Healthy gums are firm, pink and flat—they do not bleed when brushed or flossed



What causes Periodontal Disease?

The primary cause of periodontal disease is plaque which collects on everybody's teeth. Plaque is a sticky yellow film which consists mainly of food debris and bacteria. This makes the gum inflamed which is why they bleed. The bacteria also produce toxins & enzymes which damage the gingival (gum) tissues. Long standing untreated gingivitis may eventually progress to affect the supporting tissues of our teeth eventually can to tooth loss.

Secondary causes

Smoking— a major cause (see information below)

Plaque traps e.g. dentures, crowns, bridges, calculus (tartar), cavities & crowded teeth.

Hormones e.g. diabetes, pregnancy & puberty.

Drugs e.g. Phenytoin (epilepsy), Cyclosporine (immunosuppressant) & Nifedipine (hypertension).

Dry mouth.

Mouth breathing.

Downs Syndrome.

Healthy Gingivae

Gingivae appear firm and pink.

They do not bleed when brushed or flossed.

There is no pain.

They may be stippled.

There is no loss of any of the supporting bone visible on your x rays.



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Gingivitis

Gingivae appear red and sometimes swollen. They often bleed easily when brushed but there is no pain.

At this stage there will be no long lasting damage to the tissues.

The inflammation is reversible with daily flossing/tepe use and a good tooth brushing technique. (Ask your

Dentist or Hygienist to demonstrate this to you).

Periodontitis

When gingivitis becomes established, the bacteria present continue to produce toxins. This can trigger further responses within our body which slowly affect the supporting tissue, including the bones of the jaw where the teeth sit. This bone loss is usually very slow, but it is irreversible.

Things to look out for

Red inflamed gums that bleed easily when brushed or flossed

Halitosis (bad breath).

Teeth may start to move and drift apart.

Gum abscesses (swellings in the gums).

Pain, but not always.

Pockets form around the tooth – this is where the gum is so inflamed that it starts to peel away from the tooth and a “pocket” between the tooth and gum develops, this can trap more plaque and make the gums bleed more.

Bone loss can be visible on your dental x-rays. The picture below clearly shows how much bone has been lost – the bottom yellow line represents where the healthy bone should be whilst the top line shows the actual level of the bone after the progression of gum disease.

Extensive bone loss can lead to tooth loss.



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Treatment:

Successful treatment requires a joint effort from patient and dentist/hygienist although it is your daily routine that makes all the difference.

Professional cleaning – this involves regular cleaning by your hygienist to remove hard deposits of calculus above and below the gum line. In more severe cases, several longer treatments may be needed. This will include detailed measurements being taken as a base line guide and also deep scaling and cleaning. This can be done with local anaesthetic if required.

Your Dentist will decide the duration, frequency and type of appointment you require.

Home care is the most vital part of treatment– Teeth and gums should be thoroughly brushed twice per day as well as daily cleaning between the teeth using dental floss or interdental brushes. Change your manual and electric toothbrush head regularly.

Quit smoking– this maybe the most important change you can make for your general health as well as for the health of your gums!

Important– inflamed gums will bleed initially when you brush & floss. This is only temporary, it is vital you continue thorough cleaning as these symptoms will stop within a few weeks.

Smoking & Periodontal Disease

This is a major cause of premature tooth loss. The many chemicals in tobacco including cyanide, carbon monoxide and nicotine, accelerate the bone loss around the teeth. Smokers also tend to have more tooth staining and calculus and tobacco is known to cause mouth cancers. Smokers tend to have less bleeding and so miss the warning signs of gingivitis.

Statistics show that smokers are up to six times more likely to develop gum disease than non-smokers, because of the detrimental effect on their body's immune system.

Numerous dental studies have shown that smokers suffer worse gum disease than non-smokers. They also respond less well to homecare attempts and professional treatment. Smokers also lose more teeth through gum disease and this tends to be at a younger age. However, former smokers can respond as well to periodontal treatment as non-smokers within a few months of quitting smoking.

Quitting smoking is therefore beneficial.



Mouth Cancer

In 2005, there were 4,400 new cases of oral cancer in the UK and 1,700 deaths. Oral cancer has a higher fatality rate than breast cancer, cervical cancer or skin melanoma.

New cases are increasing and despite improved treatments, mortality rates are about 50%. The low survival rate is often due to late detection.

If mouth cancer is diagnosed in its early stages however, it can respond well to treatment and the chances of a complete cure are good. Early signs of mouth cancer can be a non-healing mouth ulcer or a red or white patch in the mouth.

You should visit a Dentist as soon as possible if you have a mouth ulcer that has not healed within three weeks, or if you have noticed any unusual changes or discolorations in your mouth. Oral cancer can occur in any part of the mouth, including the tongue, gums, lips and throat, and cancers can also occur at other sites located in the face, head and neck area.

It is most common in men over 40 who both smoke and drink alcohol and is twice as likely to strike men as women. Heavy drinkers and smokers carry 38 times the risk of people who do neither. An increasing number of women and younger people are being affected without the usual associated risk factors. Early detection is a crucial factor to successful treatment. Dentists are able to detect early signs.

During routine dental check-ups, your dentist will check your mouth, including your tongue, gums and lips, but also your face, head and neck for signs of cancer.

Things people can do to protect themselves against mouth cancer:

Stop smoking! – It is the major cause of mouth cancer.

Reduce alcohol consumption, as this poses almost as big a risk as smoking.

People who both smoke and drink heavily are up to 38 times more likely to develop the condition.

Avoid excessive exposure to sunlight to help prevent lip cancer.

Enjoy a healthy balanced diet.

Visit your Dentist if a mouth ulcer or a white/ red patch in your mouth does not clear after three weeks.

Visit your Dentist at least once a year.

Periodontal Disease & Diabetes

These two diseases are closely related.

If you are diabetic you are more prone to gum disease, and your gum disease is often more severe. But even if you are diabetic, gum disease is still preventable with the above guidance.

Periodontal disease can also affect your sugar levels and therefore affect how well you are able to control your diabetes.

Following advice to improve your oral hygiene can help improve your general health!