

Gum Disease

What is gum disease?

Gum disease is a complex condition affecting the gums and bone supporting your teeth. Several factors contribute to it, including family history, smoking and chronic diseases such as diabetes.

The simplest form of gum disease, gingivitis, is often a reaction to a build up of plaque on the junction of the gum and the teeth. Plaque is a soft, sticky film of bacteria, which grow on the warm, moist surface of the mouth. Plaque builds up in difficult to clean areas, especially the contact areas of the teeth. It is important to clean these areas daily with interdental brushes or dental floss.

Healthy gingivae

- firm and pink
- don't bleed when brushed or flossed
- stippled
- painless

Signs of gingivitis

- Bleeding gums
- may also look red and swollen



Healthy Gum

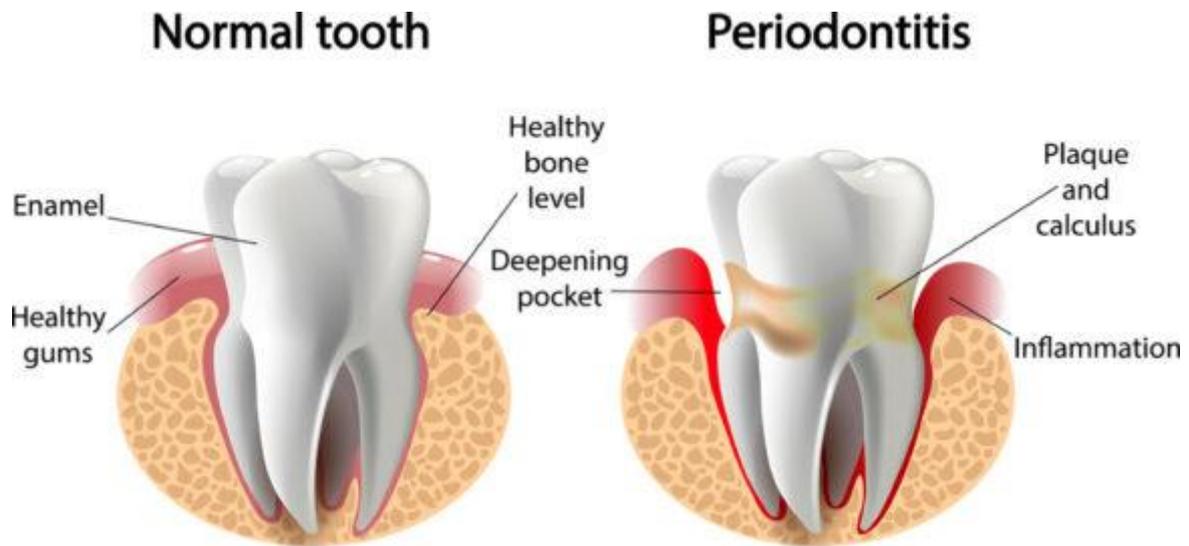


Inflamed Gum

Gingivitis can often be cured simply with good oral hygiene – brushing twice a day, together with the use of interdental cleaning and mouthwash, as advised by your dental healthcare professional. If your gums become sore or infected and you notice an unpleasant metallic taste, this is acute gingivitis and you should seek advice from your dentist.

Progression of gum disease

As gum disease progresses the tissues holding teeth in place start to break down and pockets (gaps) develop between gum and teeth. This allows more plaque to gather. Bone supporting the tooth will slowly be lost. This stage is called **chronic periodontitis**. It is usually painless but can become quite severe if not treated, resulting in teeth becoming loose, appearing to move position and eventually falling out. Periodontitis is preventable it is usually caused by poor dental hygiene.



What's the Difference Between Gingivitis and Periodontitis?

Gingivitis – gum inflammation usually precedes periodontitis (gum disease). However, it is important to know that not all gingivitis progresses to periodontitis. Gingivitis can be reversed and stopped

In the early stage of gingivitis, bacteria in plaque build up, causing the gums to become inflamed and to easily bleed during tooth brushing. Although the gums may be irritated, the teeth are still firmly planted in their sockets. No irreversible bone or other tissue damage has occurred at this stage.

What are the Symptoms and signs of periodontitis?

- Inflamed (swollen) gums, loss of attachment
- Gums are bright red, sometimes purple
- Gums hurt when touched
- Gums recede, making teeth look longer
- Extra spaces appear between the teeth
- Pus may appear between the teeth and gums

- Bleeding when brushing teeth
- Bleeding when flossing
- Metallic taste in the mouth
- Halitosis (bad breath)
- Loose teeth
- The patient's "bite" feels different because the teeth do not fit the same.

The following factors are linked to a higher risk of periodontitis:

Smoking- regular smokers are much more likely to develop gum problems. Smoking also undermines the effectiveness of treatments.

Hormonal changes in females- puberty, pregnancy, and the menopause are moments in life when a female's hormones undergo changes. Such changes raise the risk of developing gum diseases.

Diabetes- patients who live with diabetes have a much higher incidence of gum disease than other individuals of the same age

Cancer- cancer, and some cancer treatments can make gum diseases more of a problem

Medications- some medications that reduce saliva are linked to gum disease risk.

Genetics- some people are more genetically susceptible to gum diseases.

Treatment

Some of the dental treatments below may be recommended if you have gum disease.

Home care

Successful treatment requires that you apply good home care dentists and hygienists cannot keep your mouth healthy by themselves. Brush your teeth and gums twice daily, use interdental cleaning aids and mouthwash as recommended by your dentist or dental professional.

Scale and polish

To remove plaque and calculus (hardened plaque) that can build up on your teeth, your dentist may suggest that you have your teeth scaled and polished. This is a "professional clean" usually carried out at your dental surgery by a dental hygienist or dentist.

The dental hygienist/dentist will scrape away plaque and calculus from your teeth using hand or ultrasonic instruments, then polish your teeth to remove marks or stains. If a lot of plaque or tartar has built up, you may need to have more than one scale and polish.

Root planing

In some cases of gum disease, root planing (debridement) may be required. This is a deep clean under the gums that gets rid of bacteria from the roots of your teeth.

Before having the treatment, you may need to have a local anaesthetic to numb the area. You may experience some pain and discomfort for up to 48 hours after having root planing.

Further treatment

If you have severe gum disease, you may need further treatment, such as periodontal surgery. In some cases, it's necessary to remove the affected tooth. Your dentist will be able to tell you about the procedure needed and how it's carried out. If necessary, they can refer you to a specialist.

Smoking & Periodontal Disease

This is a major cause of premature tooth loss. The many chemicals in tobacco, that accelerate bone loss around the teeth.

Smokers also tend to have more tooth staining and calculus

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.