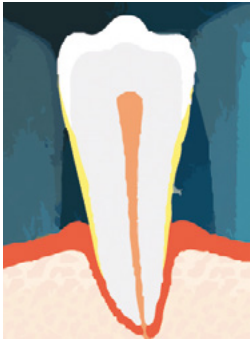


Periodontal (gum) diseases



What are they?

The simplest form of gum disease, gingivitis, is often a reaction to a build up of plaque on the junction of the gum on the teeth. Plaque is a soft, sticky film that forms every day on the teeth and gums. It is made up of bacteria which live on the sugars from things we eat and drink. Plaque builds up in difficult to clean areas, especially below the contact areas between teeth. It is important to clean these areas daily with floss, tape or small interdental 'bottle' brushes.

The earliest sign of disease is bleeding of the gums. They may also look red or swollen. Gingivitis can often be cured simply with good mouth hygiene – brushing twice a day for at least 2 minutes in the morning and evening and using other mouth hygiene aids, such as floss and/or interdental brushes for the spaces between teeth, as advised by your dentist or hygienist. They will also advise on the use of any medicated mouth rinses, if your gums become infected or sore and you notice an unpleasant metallic taste, this is acute gingivitis and you should seek urgent treatment.

As the disease progresses the tissues holding teeth in place start to break down and pockets in the gum form around the teeth which allow even more plaque to gather. This stage is called chronic periodontitis. It is usually painless and can become quite severe if not treated resulting in teeth becoming loose, appearing to move position or eventually to fall out.

Symptoms to watch out for are:

- Gums that have come away from teeth.
- Pus between the teeth and gums.
- Persistent bad breath or a bad taste.
- Permanent teeth that are loose or are changing position.

Chronic Periodontitis can only be controlled if you keep your teeth and gums thoroughly clean. Your dentist or hygienist can show you how to do this properly. Scaling and polishing by a dentist or hygienist can remove tartar and stains. This can help you to remove the plaque efficiently. In more severe cases of gum disease, deep cleaning below the gumline by a dentist, hygienist or periodontal specialist may be necessary. Occasionally surgery is required in which the gum is reshaped under local anaesthetic, to allow affected areas to be treated and cleaned. If gum disease has progressed too far, the tooth or teeth involved may have to be removed.

Who gets gum disease?

Gum disease can start when you are a child, but chronic periodontitis is normally only a problem in adults. Some people are naturally more prone to gum disease. It is important to visit the dentist regularly, so this can be identified and you can get advice on managing it.

There are other factors that can increase your risk of periodontal disease:

- Smoking makes gum disease considerably worse. Quitting smoking is important for your general and mouth health.
- Diabetes and some other diseases reduce people's resistance to gum disease. People who have these conditions need to be especially careful about their mouth hygiene.
- Certain drugs and medicines can affect your gums: ask your dentist about these.
- Crooked teeth are more difficult to keep clean, so the gums supporting such teeth might be more prone to gum disease.
- Existing gum disease can be worsened by hormonal changes, due to pregnancy or oral contraceptives ('the pill'). Here again, good hygiene is important.
- Eating a healthy diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables helps resist gum diseases.