

What Is Periodontal Disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection of the tissue that supports your teeth. It attacks just below the gum line, where it causes the attachment of the tooth and its supporting tissues to break down.

WARNING SIGNS

- Pain in the mouth
- Gums bleed when brushing
- Spaces develop between teeth
- Swollen and tender gums
- Receding gums (exposing the bottom of your teeth)
- Persistent bad breath
- Pus between teeth and gums
- Sores develop

RISK FACTORS

- Tobacco use
- Systemic diseases
- Use of certain types of medicine
- Bridges that no longer fit
- Crooked teeth
- Fillings that have become defective
- Pregnancy
- Oral cancer



Periodontal Disease: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

It is estimated that 35.7 million Americans are living with a bacterial infection of the gums known as periodontal disease.¹ This infection attacks the tissue that keeps your teeth attached to your gums.

On average, more than 500 species of bacteria live in your mouth.² Some of these bacteria are beneficial, while others under the right conditions can cause disease. Living a healthy lifestyle helps you keep the harmful bacteria under control. Not taking care of your overall health and your

teeth and gums can cause an overgrowth of harmful bacteria, which may lead to serious health problems beyond the mouth, in addition to the threat of losing your teeth.

Factors that predispose people to gum disease include bad oral hygiene and genetics. In fact, research has proved that up to 30% of the population may be genetically predisposed to gum disease.³

Periodontitis, a severe form of periodontal disease, is caused by plaque that develops just below the gum line, in the area called the sulcus or periodontal pocket, where it causes the attachment of the tooth and its supporting tissues to break down. The mildest form of periodontal disease is known as gingivitis and is triggered by bacterial plaque that forms at the gum line.

35.7
million

Americans are living with a bacterial infection of the gums known as periodontal disease

This patient education is brought to you by an unrestricted grant from

Colgate

Did You Know? Oral Health May Affect Your Whole Body

When bacteria expand in the pockets of the gums, gingivitis results, triggering redness and inflammation, a warning sign for possible progression to periodontitis and the destruction of gum tissue. If periodontitis develops, some oral bacteria may enter the blood stream and, along with the potent chemicals they release and the body's own immune response, circulate throughout the body. This event may contribute to processes that may compromise your overall health.⁴

A Pocket?

A space that forms between the teeth and gums.

For example, not only can periodontal diseases cause bad breath and tooth loss, but they may contribute to a variety of serious life threatening systemic conditions including:

- heart disease
- stroke
- diabetes

Researchers are now investigating the relationship between periodontitis and chronic systemic diseases.

Reprints

If you would like to print additional copies of this piece log onto our Web site www.contemporaryoralhygieneonline.com. You can also personalize copies for your practice on a variety of oral hygiene topics.

References are available at the *Contemporary Oral Hygiene* Web site.

What You Can Do

Brushing and flossing: These 2 activities break up plaque that coats the tooth and gum surfaces. Brush using toothpaste with antiplaque and antibacterial properties. Without proper home care—including brushing and flossing—bacterial plaque accumulates on your teeth. Over time, this causes inflammation and damage to gum tissue and bone.

Use soft-bristled toothbrushes rather than hard bristles, which may cause damage to your gums. Flossing daily and consistently is extremely important to keep the area between your teeth and below the gum line as healthy as possible.

If you have periodontitis, speak to your dentist, hygienist, and physician about the association of periodontitis with systemic diseases.

7 Steps to Healthy Teeth and Gums

1. Brush twice daily with a softbristle brush.
2. Use a toothpaste with antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.
3. Floss daily to clean between teeth and below the gum line.
4. Rinse with a mouthwash designed to fight tartar and plaque.
5. Get regular dental checkups and medical checkups.
6. Pay attention to your dental hygienist's comments during your examination and cleaning.
7. Keep your dental chart up to date by telling the hygienist about your health issues and medications.

After the Diagnosis

If you're showing warning signs, see your dentist. Mild gum disease may be controlled by routine professional teeth cleanings and more diligent home care. Gingivitis and early periodontitis can be kept under control by your dental team.

Scaling and root planing also may be a step your dentist or hygienist takes to control early to moderate periodontitis. Scaling removes hard and soft deposits of calculus from the crown of the tooth. Root planing smooths away calculus deposits that collect on the root surfaces beneath the gums.¹

Local, needle-free methods are available to keep you comfortable during this process. Your dental professional may also choose to perform this treatment one area of your mouth at a time over a series of office visits.

For advanced gum diseases, surgical treatments using local anesthetics may be performed. To reduce the size of gingival pockets, a periodontist folds back the gum tissue and removes the disease causing bacteria. He or she may also reshape the bone and gum, add bone grafts if necessary, and then stitch the tissue back into place.

TREATING PERIODONTAL DISEASE

What Are the Options?

- Scaling and root planing
- Chlorhexidine (contained in dentist-dispensed rinses)
- Antimicrobial inserts into pockets (placed by dentists or hygienists)
- Periodontal surgery