

Gum disease

Gum disease is essentially swelling, soreness or infection in the tissues supporting the teeth. There are two variations, often referred to as gingivitis and periodontal disease. In fact both are the same issue.

Gingivitis

Gingivitis means inflammation of the gums. The gums become very red and swollen. Often gums bleed when they are brushed. This may or may not lead to damage to the other supporting tooth tissues

Periodontal disease

Long-standing gum disease can turn into periodontal disease. Periodontal disease affects the supporting tissues of the teeth and the ligaments holding the tooth in the bone. As the disease gets worse, the bond in which the teeth sit is lost and teeth can become mobile.

If left untreated, the teeth can eventually fall out or need extracting.

Most people suffer from some type of gum disease at some time but the disease does develop at a slow rate and it can be slowed down to a rate where most of your teeth can be retained for most of your life.

Causes of gum disease

Gum disease is caused by plaque. Plaque is a film of bacteria and food that forms on the surfaces of teeth and gums every day. Many of the bacteria in plaque are harmless, but some are shown to be the main cause of gum disease.

To prevent and treat gum disease you need to make sure that you remove all the plaque from your teeth every day. This is done by brushing and flossing.

Smoking can make gum disease worse. Patients who smoke are more likely to produce the bacterial plaque which causes gum disease. Smoking also causes a lack of oxygen in the bloodstream, so the infected gums fail to heal. Smoking causes gum disease to progress more rapidly.

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What happens if gum disease is left untreated?

Gum disease can progress painlessly so that you do not initially notice the damage that it is causing. Gums can become sore and this can lead to gum abscesses, and pus may ooze from around the teeth. Over a number of years, the bone support to the teeth can be destroyed and the teeth lost. If the disease is left untreated for a long time, it does in turn become more difficult to treat.

The first sign is blood on your toothbrush or in the rinsing water when you clean your teeth. Your gums can also bleed when you are eating. Your breath may also become unpleasant.

The first thing to do is visit your dentist. The dentist or practice hygienist will be able to take measurements of your gums to assess if there is any sign of periodontal disease. X-rays can also be taken to see the amount of supporting bone that has been lost. This assessment is very important so that the correct treatment can be prescribed.

Your dental surgeon or hygienist can thoroughly clean your teeth, and can show you how to remove plaque yourself. Once your teeth are clean, further treatment may be required on the roots of the teeth to ensure that all pockets of bacteria have been removed. This is known as root planing. Your gums may be made numb while this is done and you may feel some discomfort for 24 hours after this treatment.

Once I have had periodontal disease, can I get it again?

The periodontal disease is never cured, but as long as you keep up the homecare you have been taught, any further loss of bone will be very slow and it may stop altogether. You must make sure you remove plaque every day, and go for regular check ups by the dentist and dental hygienist.