

What you need to know about gum disease

Gum disease

You need not lose your teeth to gum disease, also call periodontal disease. With today's treatment procedures, most teeth can be saved. You may have gum disease and not realize it. This disease is the primary cause of the loss of teeth after age 35. If caught in its early stages, however gum disease can be reversed with proper care.

The facts about gum disease!

Periodontal disease, commonly referred to as gum disease, is the single most common cause of tooth loss in adults. Gum disease, including gingivitis and periodontitis, are serious infections that left untreated, can lead to tooth loss. This inflammatory disease is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums, bones and other supporting structures of the teeth.

Stages and Progression

In the mildest form of the disease, gingivitis, there is usually little or no discomfort. It is often caused by inadequate oral hygiene. Early-stage gum disease is reversible with professional treatment and good oral home care.

Untreated, early-stage gum disease can advance to more serious periodontitis. Gum disease is caused by plaque, a colorless film of bacteria that forms on the teeth. Toxins produced by the bacteria in the plaque irritate the gums and cause them to become red, tender and swollen. If not removed daily, plaque hardens to form calculus (tartar) around the back of the teeth. With time, plaque can spread and grow beneath the gum line. The toxins stimulate a chronic inflammatory response that breaks down the tissues and bone that support the teeth.

Eventually gums separate from the teeth, forming pockets (spaces between the teeth and gums) that become infected. As the disease progresses, the pockets deepen and more gum tissue and bone are destroyed. In time, teeth can become loose and may be removed. Gum disease is also linked to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease and osteoporosis.

Other Causes of Periodontal Disease

1. Physical and chemical irritants: Impacted food, tobacco products, alcohol and the improper use of dental floss or toothpicks may irritate gum tissue.
2. Abnormal oral conditions or habits: Badly aligned teeth, poorly fitting bridges or partial dentures, defective fillings and harmful habits, such as grinding the teeth and chewing ice, can also cause problems.
3. Unbalanced Diet: Evidence shows a link between nutritional deficiency and the body's ability to fight off infection.

4. Women and hormones: Some life stages from women require extra attention to oral health including puberty, pregnancy and menopause. Pregnant women with gum disease are seven times more likely to deliver preterm, low birth-weight babies.
5. Certain medications: Oral contraceptives, anti-epilepsy drugs, steroids and cancer therapy drugs may have a negative affect.
6. Certain diseases and conditions: Diabetes, uremia liver cirrhosis, anemia and leukemia are among the many diseases that may affect the health of you gums. Stress in linked to many serious conditions, including lowered immunity to infection, such as periodontal disease.

What Are the Signs?

- Gums that bleed when you brush or floss your teeth
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have receded or shrunken away from your teeth
- Pus between your teeth when you press your gums with your finger
- Pain when chewing
- Calculus or tartar buildup
- Teeth that seem loose or that change position
- Changes in your bite
- Changes in the way your partial dentures fit
- Bad breath or chronic bad taste in your mouth
- Teeth that are overly sensitive to hot and cold

Diagnosis

A thorough oral examination, including x-rays, is crucial to diagnosing periodontal disease. In most cases, we recommend an in-office exam and tooth cleaning for all adults twice a year. At that time, we may use a special instrument called a periodontal probe to measure the depth of the pocket between the tooth and the gum tissue. The pocket depth measurement, clinical examination and x-rays help us determine the precise location, extent and severity of gum disease.

Treatment

The type of treatment you require depends on your particular case. Individualized treatment may include any of the following:

1. More frequent cleaning. It may take the bacteria at the base of the pocket up to three months to colonize into numbers able to destroy bone. Frequent cleanings can prevent this buildup.
2. Scaling and root planning is the non-surgical removal of the calculus deposits from you teeth. Root planning is the smoothing of the root surfaces so that the

gum tissue can reattach to the tooth. Even when this procedure is successful, the majority of patients will need ongoing maintenance therapy to maintain health.

3. Laser therapy may offer potential benefits to patients for removing the calculus from the tooth pockets where bacteria reside.
4. Periodontal surgery. If you're diagnosed with gum disease, your periodontist may recommend surgery. Periodontal surgery is necessary when your periodontist determines that the tissue around your teeth is unhealthy and cannot be repaired with non-surgical treatment. Following are the four types of surgical treatments most commonly prescribed:
 - a. Pocket Reduction Procedures
 - b. Regenerative procedures
 - c. Crown lengthening
 - d. Soft tissue grafts
5. Dental implant is an artificial tooth root for when one or more teeth are lost. They can also be used to support a full or partial denture. Implants are the permanent way for you to replace missing teeth, with a look and feel that's very close to natural teeth.

Final word

Each of us is different, and so is our individual ability to resist diseases. Some patients are more susceptible than others to periodontal disease. Fortunately, you don't have to lose your teeth to gum disease. With today's state-of-the-art treatment procedures, you can feel assured that most teeth can be saved.

Good periodontal health starts with you.

Here's what you can do to prevent or control gum disease:

1. Thoroughly brush and floss your teeth every day.
2. Eat a well-balanced diet, avoiding sticky sweet and junk food.
3. Examine your mouth routinely for any early signs of gum disease or other oral changes.
4. Visit us at least twice a year for a thorough cleaning and oral examination.