

TREATMENT OF GUM INFECTIONS

Periodontal disease is the inflammation and infection of the gums. It is caused by plaque, a thick and sticky film of bacteria that builds up on the teeth.

Plaque can harden to become calculus, also known as tartar. Plaque and calculus are caused by poor hygiene; that is, the teeth have not been cleaned thoroughly or often enough.

Early stage of gum disease: Bacteria in plaque and calculus can damage the gums and cause gingivitis, an inflammation of the gums. Gingivitis can usually be treated successfully by removal of the plaque and calculus, followed by thorough but gentle cleaning (that is, flossing then brushing every day).

Advanced stage of gum disease: the advanced stage of gum disease is called periodontitis. It can cause serious damage to teeth and the gums, and bone that supports the teeth.

As gum inflammation and infection get worse, pockets form between gum and teeth, and gum may recede from the teeth. As a result, teeth can become loose, fall out or require extraction by a dentist.

Periodontitis can result in the loss of many teeth in some people.

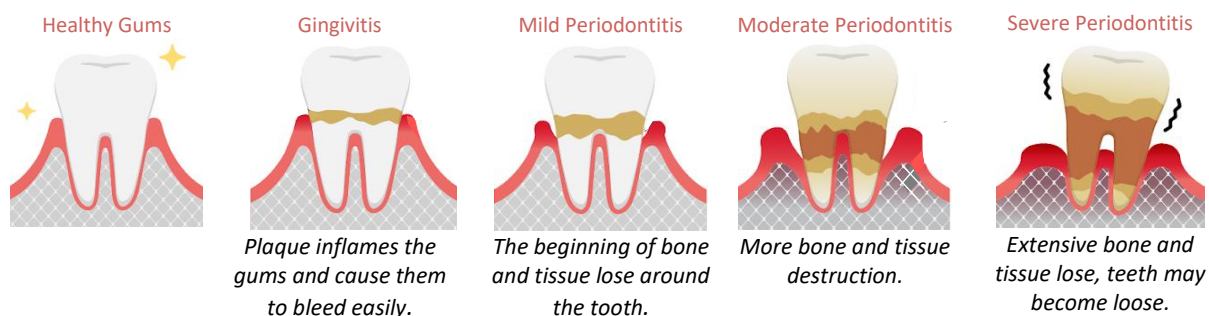
Benefits of treatment: The purpose of periodontal treatment is to stop or slow down the progression of gum disease.

Benefits include having:

- a mouth that feels, looks and is healthier
- teeth that feel smooth and look clean
- a better chance of keeping your teeth for life.

Signs of periodontal disease

- Red, swollen, tender, painful or bleeding gums
- Gums that have shrunk from the teeth
- Persistent bad breath
- A bad taste in the mouth
- Abscesses between teeth and gums
- The fit of a denture has changed
- Loose teeth, drifting apart of teeth, and gaps appearing between teeth.



Diagnosis of periodontal disease

Your dentist will check your oral health by examining your teeth and gums, and noting whether plaque and calculus are present. Tooth fillings are examined to check whether they are well-shaped and smooth, and are not loose or contributing to gum disease.

Your dentist or periodontist will check for any change in the size, shape, appearance and texture of the gums which may indicate disease. A periodontal probe may be used to identify areas where gums bleed easily or have recessed, or where pockets have developed (as shown above).

Your dentist or periodontist will check each tooth for movement, as gum disease can cause teeth to shift position or become loose.

An x-ray examination may be needed to check whether the bony socket around each tooth is healthy.

Your dental history: Your dentist will ask you about any problems you may have had with your health and teeth. A previous health problem can affect your treatment and medication.

Be certain to give your dentist or periodontist your complete dental and medical history, including any major illnesses, heart problems, surgery, and reactions to medicines, especially antibiotics. This will help the dentist or periodontist to determine which treatment is best for you. Your dental and medical history is confidential.

Treatment of Periodontal Disease

After examining your gums and teeth, your dentist may recommend periodontal treatment. A treatment plan will be developed in consultation with you. Ask any questions you may have, for example, about treatment, benefits, risks, time frames or costs.

Treatment may be by a dentist, periodontist or, where appropriate, dental hygienist working under instruction. Treatment may involve the following.

- Removal of build-ups of plaque and calculus using dental instruments.
- Scaling: The tooth surface is cleaned to remove plaque and calculus from above the gum line. Scaling usually requires only one visit.
- Root planning: Deposits of plaque and calculus on tooth roots and in deeper pockets beneath the gum line are removed using instruments that leave the root surface clean and smooth. A local anaesthetic may be needed to numb the teeth and gums being treated. Root planning may require several visits for different areas of the mouth to be treated.
- Replacement of fillings: If a filling is contributing to gum disease, it may need to be reshaped or replaced.
- Instructions on how to improve your oral hygiene, including removal of plaque by better brushing and cleaning between the teeth.
- Quit smoking: smoking increases the risk of gum disease and reduces the chances of successful treatment.

Your dentist or periodontist will evaluate the results of treatment. If the gums have responded well and oral hygiene is good, a program to maintain your oral health will be developed. Scaling and root planning may have to be repeated during the maintenance phase.

If the gums have not healed well and still have signs of disease, you may need to take a course of antibiotics. In severe cases, periodontal surgery may be required.

If you do not have treatment, the risk is that gum disease may get worse, leading to tooth loss.

Your dentist or periodontist can discuss with you various options to replace lost teeth, such as dental implants, bridges or dentures.

Side effects of treatment

Side effects of periodontal treatment may include the following.

- Pain during scaling and root planning. A local anaesthetic may be needed to help numb that area being cleaned.
- Gum tenderness. An extra soft toothbrush or a mouthwash containing chlorhexidine may be used if regular brushing causes discomfort.
- Tooth sensitivity. Within a week of treatment, any tooth sensitivity usually diminishes. (Special toothpastes can reduce sensitivity, or your dentist or periodontist can apply a desensitising varnish.)
- Gum shrinkage. This is more likely to occur if gum tissues are swollen at the start of treatment.
- Increased risk of decay around exposed root surfaces. Your dentist or periodontist may recommend a daily fluoride mouth rinse to help decrease the risk of decay.

There is no guarantee that periodontal treatment will save an affected tooth. Please ask questions, and discuss any concerns with your dentist or periodontist.

Preventing and controlling periodontal disease

To cure periodontal disease or keep it under control:

- excellent oral hygiene must be maintained daily
- bleeding from the gums, caused by periodontal disease, must be decreased or stopped
- plaque and calculus on the teeth roots must be routinely removed
- enlarged gum pockets around the teeth must be regularly treated.

As gum diseases tend to recur, maintenance therapy will follow periodontal treatment and is most important. The aim is for you and your dentist or periodontist to work together to prevent, monitor and control periodontal disease.

You can help prevent gum disease by taking good care of your teeth every day and having regular dental check-ups. Effective toothbrushing will remove most of the plaque that builds up on the teeth, although brushing does not remove all plaque from between teeth. Dental floss, tooth picks or special "interdental brushes" should be used to reach surfaces of teeth touched by neighboring teeth.

Daily brushing and cleaning between your teeth will keep gums and teeth clean and reduce the risk of gum disease. Ask your dentist or periodontist for further information on correct plaque-control techniques. Depending on the condition of your gums, you may need to come back as often as every three months so that plaque deposits under the gums can be removed, reducing the risk for further gum disease.