

## Health Advice

### What do healthy teeth and gums look like?

Healthy gums are firm and have a pink appearance. The edges can not be separated from the teeth and they should not bleed when teeth are brushed properly.

### What is plaque?

Plaque is the film of bacteria which begins to form on your teeth as soon as you finish brushing your teeth. You can not prevent plaque from forming but you can clean teeth carefully every day to remove it before it builds up in sufficient amounts to cause damage.

### What is Gum Disease?

Gum disease or periodontal disease, is the inflammation of the tissues which support teeth and attach them to the jaw.

If the inflammation only involves the soft gum, it is called gingivitis. Once the inflammation progresses and reaches the underlying bone, it is termed periodontitis.

Both are caused by plaque. The bacteria in plaque produce toxins which inflame the gum.

### Gingivitis

Only the gum is affected in the early stages. You may notice red swollen gums which bleed on brushing.

Teeth affected by gingivitis can be treated relatively easily with very good results. Your dentist or hygienist will ensure your teeth are free from tartar and that you know how to clean them properly. After that, thorough cleaning every day will make the gums firm and healthy again.

### Periodontitis

If the disease is not stopped, it continues to spread down under the gum. The infection spreads to the bone that holds the teeth in the jaw and starts to destroy the bone. Gum abscesses can occur in the deep spaces between the gum and the tooth and as more bone destruction occurs, teeth begin to loosen. Once bone has been lost it cannot be replaced naturally.

If the disease process is not stopped then the affected tooth or teeth will fall out. In these stages your dentist or hygienist will need to remove any deposits from around the affected teeth. This is done by deep scaling and root planning which may require several appointments.

If the disease is severe your dentist may refer you to a specialist dentist (Periodontist) for treatment.

## What are the signs of periodontal disease?

- Red, swollen gums
- Bleeding gums
- Bad breath
- Bad taste
- Gum recession
- Teeth drifting
- Loose teeth

## Is Periodontal disease common?

Yes. Nearly every adult is affected by some form of gum disease at some stage and many teeth are extracted because of advanced periodontitis.

## How can I prevent gum disease?

Gum disease can usually be prevented by good and careful teeth cleaning and a regular scale and polish with your dentist or hygienist. Even if you brush your teeth twice a day, this does not always mean that you are doing it effectively! You may be missing a few areas of your mouth every time you brush your teeth and these will be the areas vulnerable to gum disease.

Your dentist will check your gums by gently probing around your teeth. Additionally x-rays may be taken to show the bone levels around your teeth. Your dentist will be keeping a record of the condition of your gums as they are part of the supporting structures of your teeth and are as important as your teeth.

Smoking has been found to be a major risk factor for gum disease and every effort should be made to stop smoking as part of the treatment for this condition. Studies have also shown a link between gum disease and diabetes.

Once you have periodontal disease, it is never cured, but as long as you keep up the home care you have been advised, any further loss of bone will be very slow and it may stop altogether. However, you must make sure you remove plaque twice a day, and return for regular dental examinations with your dentist and maintenance cleaning visits with the hygienist.