

Gum Disease

What is Gum Disease?

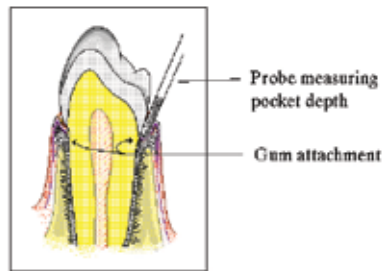
When you visit your dentist regularly he or she can monitor your oral health by examining both your teeth and gums thoroughly. Periodontal (gum) disease can begin without you realising it, so the earlier it is identified and treated, the better.

Gum disease is an infection of the tooth anchorage. It destroys the supporting structures of the tooth. Teeth become loose and the gums recede. If untreated it results in tooth loss. It is most often painless until very severe. Fortunately, it is a preventable process.

What Are The Signs Of Gum Disease?

Initially, your dentist will be looking for signs of change in the normal healthy gum tissue. There may be specific areas where your gums appear red and swollen, and bleed easily. Your dentist will then look for a build up of plaque and calculus which has caused these changes.

Periodontal pockets refer to the pouches that form when plaque has tracked down the root of the tooth, destroying the deeper tissues of the gum including bony tissue. If pockets are present, these are best identified by the use of the periodontal probe. In healthy mouths only very shallow pockets exist. When deep pockets exist the teeth may be loose.



Healthy tooth showing normal pocket depth.

Bleeding may occur if the gums are inflamed. Healthy gums do not bleed. Bleeding gums are one of the clearest signs of gum disease, especially during tooth brushing. Bleeding gums are a warning sign to seek professional help and to check your oral hygiene habits.

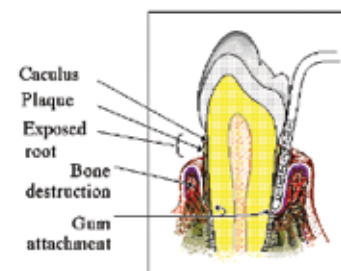
Your dentist may take x-rays of your teeth. X-rays can look "under the gums" to see how much supporting jaw bone is present around the roots of the teeth. As well, they can help in excluding other causes of dental infections which might be contributing to your problems.

When shown these changes by your dentist, you will be able to see the difference between healthy gums and gums affected by plaque and calculus build up. Your dentist will assess the ability of the gums to heal, and then will be able to discuss the treatment required, with you.

Will There Be Any Other Visits?

If you require treatment for periodontal disease, you will be asked to make additional appointments. On completion of your treatment, a follow up appointment will be arranged to check that your gum tissue is healthy and there is no regression.

By having regular dental visits you will ensure that your dentist can maintain and monitor the health of both your teeth and gums.



Advanced periodontal disease

Prevention

Plaque should be removed carefully at least once each day to keep gum disease at bay. This means using a toothbrush followed by floss or interproximal brushes. The only permanent way of treating and preventing gum disease is to practise careful plaque control. Once gone it will not return as long as the teeth are cleaned properly.