

PERIODONTAL (GUM) DISEASE

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

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, known also as tartar.

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 by us and followed by you thoroughly brushing twice a day after breakfast and dinner and flossing once a day with your after dinner brushing.

Advanced stage of gum disease: The advanced stage is called periodontitis. It can cause serious damage to teeth, gums and bone that supports the teeth. As gum inflammation and infection get worse, gum pockets are formed, gums may recede from the teeth. As a result, the teeth can become loose, fall out or require extraction. Periodontitis can result in the loss of many teeth in some people.

Signs of periodontal disease: red, swollen, tender, painful, bleeding gums. Gums that had shrunk from the teeth. Persistent bad breath. A bad taste in the mouth. Abscesses between teeth and gums. Loose teeth, gaps appearing between teeth. Partial denture may not fit as well.

Treatment: The purpose of periodontal treatment is to stop and slow down the progress of gum disease.

- 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, and in shallow pockets below the gum line.
- Root planing: Deposits of plaque and calculus on the tooth roots and in deeper pockets beneath the gum line are removed using instruments that leave the root surface clean and smooth. This process may require several visits.
- Quit smoking: smoking increases the risk of gum disease and reduces the chance of successful treatment.

Side effects: Pain during scaling and root planing. Gum tenderness. Tooth sensitivity. Gum shrinkage (this is more likely to occur if gum tissues are swollen at the start of treatment).

To keep periodontal disease under control you must undertake excellent oral hygiene (ask your dentist how). Regular scaling every 6 months or earlier we recommend it.

Smoking and your oral health: Smoking can have major effects on the health of your gums, teeth, mouth and throat. Some problems caused by smoking are obvious, such as the staining or yellowing of teeth and bad breath. These are annoying or unpleasant but are not a threat to health. However, smoking may contribute to unseen and far more serious conditions, such as:

- Gum disease that causes teeth to fall out
- Increased risk of tooth decay
- Leukoplakia (white patches in the mouth that can be pre-cancerous)

Changes in the mouth and throat tissues that can lead to cancer.

Many diseases of the mouth and throat are linked to the smoking of cigarettes, pipes and cigars. Smoking does not have a "safe" level of use.

Regular visits to us so that we can check for early signs of oral cancer is recommended, every 6 months. Many early signs of oral cancer are painless and difficult to detect without a thorough oral examination. Early detection can significantly increase the chance of successful treatment.

Signs and symptoms of oral cancer: Sores in the mouth that bleed easily and fail to heal, white or red patches in the mouth that will not go away, lumps or soreness in the mouth, throat or tongue, difficulty in chewing or swallowing food and changes in the way that the upper and lower teeth fit together (occlusion).

Other oral conditions caused by tobacco:

Smoker's palate: a condition where the hard palate (roof of the mouth) develops a whitish discolouration, often combined with red dots. This is caused by narrowing of the blood vessels, due to nicotine. It usually disappears when the smoker quits.

Smoker's melanosis: an unsightly darkish discolouration on the cheeks and gums. It affects about one in ten smokers. In most cases, skin and gum colour slowly return to normal when the person stops smoking.

Hairy tongue: an overgrowth and thickening of hair-like protuberances on the tongue. The top surface of the tongue turns brown or black. Trapped bacteria produce a burning sensation on the tongue.

Tobacco stains: these can penetrate into tooth enamel, dentures, and discolour the teeth. While we can often clean or bleach the teeth, some discolouration of teeth can be permanent.

If you wish to quit smoking please call the QUIT hot line on 13 18 48.

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