

Periodontal or Gum Disease

Proper care of the gums is an important factor in oral and **Overall** health. Gum disease, also known as Periodontal disease is an inflammatory condition affecting the tissues that surround and support the teeth. Periodontal disease is the number 1 cause of tooth loss in the United States. The disease process begins with bacteria in the plaque, which is the sticky film that constantly forms on the teeth. If this is not mechanically removed daily with brushing and flossing, the plaque can build up and become mineralized on the teeth, and this is called tartar or calculus. This build up process can lead to infection of the gums and teeth and can progress to loss of gum tissues and bone supporting the teeth and eventually lead to tooth loss.

Signs of Gum Disease:

When plaque builds up around teeth without proper daily cleaning, gums become infected and the bone recedes. Teeth can become sensitive as the root of the tooth becomes exposed, and pus may be produced and pockets may form around the tooth. These processes and effects on the teeth and supporting tissues are not always visible when looking at the teeth and if left undetected may contribute to tooth loss. For this reason, it is important to visit the dentist regularly so they can look for the following signs of gum disease:

- bleeding gums during brushing or flossing
- sensitive, red and/or swollen gums
- measuring for pocketing around the teeth
- bad breath
- teeth that are loose or appear to have shifted

Stages of Gum Disease:

Gingivitis

This is the earliest stage of gum disease, and is limited to the inflammation of the gums caused by plaque build up. When the plaque is not removed daily with proper brushing and flossing, it produces toxins that can irritate the gum tissue. This is an early stage in gum disease and can be reversed with proper treatment and home-care.

Periodontitis

This is the stage that is characterized by loss of supporting bone and fibers that hold the teeth and this damage is **Irreversible**. Periodontitis involves pocketing around the affected teeth, and only proper dental treatment and improved home-care can stabilize and prevent further damage.

Advanced Periodontitis

This is the final stage of gum disease in which the fibers and bone supporting your teeth are destroyed, which leads to loosened and shifting teeth. If aggressive therapy can not save the teeth, then the severely affected teeth may need to be removed

Gum disease can be potentially bad and it is an avoidable occurrence that can be treated with routine dental care.

Risks of Gum Disease:

Research has found that there are links from gum disease to heart disease and stroke

There are several theories for this association.

- Inflammation caused by periodontal disease increases plaque build up, which can contribute to swelling of the arteries. People with periodontal disease are nearly two times as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease as compared to those people without the condition.
- Theories suggest that oral bacteria affect the heart when they enter the blood stream, by attaching to fatty plaque deposits in the arteries and contributing to clot formation. Coronary artery disease is caused by the thickening of the walls of the artery due to the build up of fatty acids. Blood clots obstruct the normal flow of blood and lead to insufficient nutrients and oxygen to the heart leading to heart attacks.

Research has also found that oral disease is a risk factor for stroke, as people with periodontal disease were more likely to be victims of stroke.

Pre-Term Pregnancy

According to the American Academy of Periodontology, pregnant women with Periodontal disease may be up to seven times more likely to have a baby that is born prematurely and small. Additionally, women whose periodontal disease worsens during pregnancy have an even higher risk of having a premature baby. The current recommendations are that women considering pregnancy have a periodontal evaluation as a precaution because of the link between periodontal disease and the health of the baby.

Treatment for Gum Disease

Depending on the stage of the disease will determine the level of treatment necessary. Often times, the dentist after preliminary evaluation, will refer the patient to a Periodontist, who is a dentist specializing in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of periodontal diseases.

Treatments available are non-surgical and/or surgical :

Non-surgical treatment stresses that periodontal health should be achieved in the least invasive and most cost effective manner possible. This may be accomplished through scaling and root planning, which is a cleaning, with anesthetic, of the root surfaces to remove plaque and tartar from deep periodontal pockets and smooth the surfaces free of bacterial toxins. This may be followed by antimicrobials and cleaning aids to help the patient on a case by case basis. In the event that non surgical therapy does not achieve the desired results, surgical treatments may be necessary to restore the gums.

Surgical treatments may involve *Pocket* elimination surgery to reduce the depth of the pocket to aid in daily maintenance of the teeth. This may be done in conjunction with regenerative therapy which involves grafting bone to potentially induce bone re-growth. Laser therapy may also be used in conjunction with scale and root planning to enhance the effectiveness of the procedure in detoxifying the tooth surfaces for healing and maintenance.