

Gum Disease

Gum disease is a chronic bacterial infection that may affect the gum, connective tissue and bone supporting the teeth. In the worst cases, tooth loss may result.

BACTERIA:

Our mouths are full of bacteria. In as little as 24 hours, these bacteria form a sticky, colourless 'plaque' on teeth, especially around the gum line. It is the twice daily brushing and flossing that helps to keep the levels of bacteria to a minimum. If all the plaque is not removed, it can calcify with minerals in your saliva to form calculus (also called tartar). Removal of calculus from your teeth can only be done professionally by your Dentist or Hygienist, which explains the need for six monthly maintenance appointments.

GINGIVITIS:

The continued presence of plaque can lead to inflammation of the surface tissues around the teeth, which is called gingivitis. This is a mild form of gum disease but fortunately does not include any loss of bone or tissue attachment from the teeth. Signs of gingivitis include red, swollen gums that bleed easily when touched (especially when brushing and flossing) and it makes the smile look unsightly and contributes to bad breath. These effects tend to be reversible if managed correctly.

PERIODONTITIS:

In some situations, if gingivitis is left untreated, it may advance to periodontitis. Periodontitis is inflammation that causes the gums, connective tissue and bone supporting the teeth to become permanently damaged. This causes a space to develop between the teeth and gums (called a pocket), which provides an ideal, protective environment for bacteria to remain and thrive. If the condition is left untreated, tooth abscesses may develop and tooth loss is almost inevitable.

Although the main cause of periodontal disease is plaque, there are many other factors that can accelerate the progression of the disease. These include:

- Smoking
- Hormonal changes (pregnancy)
- Diabetes
- Stress
- Medical conditions (especially conditions which cause a compromised immune system)
- Medications
- Family history (genetics)

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS OF GUM DISEASE:

- Bad breath
- Red and swollen gums
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Lots of plaque and calculus build-up on and between the teeth
- Painful chewing
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth

perfect smiles

CAN PERIODONTAL DISEASE CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS BEYOND THE MOUTH?

Research is starting to establish highly probable links between poorly managed periodontal disease and other health problems beyond your mouth. Some investigated links include:

- An increased risk of heart attack or stroke
- An increased risk of delivering pre-term and low birth weight babies,
- Difficulty controlling blood sugar levels in people with diabetes

HOW IS GUM DISEASE TREATED?

It is important to understand that periodontal disease cannot be 'cured' as such. Once the supporting tissues have been damaged, the repair of these tissues is limited. Therefore the focus of treatment is to stop the progression of the disease by reducing bacterial levels and allowing our body's defence mechanism to be in control, thus preventing further damage.

Treatment usually involves:

- Professional cleaning of your teeth both above and under the gums (in pockets).
- Minor surgery may be needed around particularly problematic teeth.
- Regular review appointments
- Modifying certain behaviours to reduce risk (i.e. for example quitting tobacco use).
- Excellent oral home care.

Generally the management of severe cases is much more difficult and the outcome is less predictable. In these situations we may recommend you see a specialist Periodontist.

Whether gum disease is stopped, slowed or gets worse, depends a great deal on the individual. So always be sure to brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and a soft toothbrush, floss each day, eat a well balanced diet and avoid tobacco products. Finally, make sure you visit us regularly for routine examinations and professional cleaning.