

GUM DISEASE

Gum disease (also called periodontal disease) is an infection of the tissues that support your teeth. It is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Because gum disease is usually painless, you may not know you have it. At each regular checkup the dentist will measure the depth of the shallow v-shaped crevice (called a sulcus) between your tooth and gums to identify whether you have gum disease.

Gum disease is caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. These bacteria create toxins that can damage the gums.

Periodontal diseases attack just below the gum line in the sulcus, where they cause the attachment of the tooth and supporting tissues to break down. As the tissues are damaged, the sulcus develops into a pocket; generally, the more severe the disease, the greater the depth of the pocket.

Periodontal diseases are classified according to the severity of the disease. The two major stages are gingivitis and periodontitis.

1. **Gingivitis**---In the early stage of gum disease, called gingivitis, the gums become red, swollen and bleed easily. At this stage, the disease is still reversible and can usually be eliminated by daily brushing and flossing.
2. **Periodontitis**---In the more advanced stages of gum disease, called periodontitis, the gums and bone that support the teeth become seriously damaged. Whereas healthy gums and bone anchor teeth firmly in place, infected gums can cause teeth to become loose, fall out, or have to be removed by a dentist.

Some factors increase the risk of developing periodontal disease:

1. Smoking or chewing
2. System-wide diseases such as diabetes
3. Some types of medication such as steroids, some types of anti-epilepsy drugs, cancer therapy drugs, some calcium channel blockers, and oral contraceptives
4. Bridges that no longer fit properly
5. Crooked teeth
6. Fillings that have become defective
7. Pregnancy

If you notice any of the following signs of gum disease, see the doctor immediately:

1. Gums that bleed easily
2. Red, swollen, tender gums
3. Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
4. Persistent bad breath or bad taste
5. Pus between your teeth and gums
6. Permanent teeth that are loose or separating
7. Any change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
8. Any change in the fit of partial dentures

It is possible to have periodontal disease and have no warning signs, that is one reason why regular dental checkups and periodontal examinations are very important. Treatment methods depend on the type of disease and how far the condition has progressed.