Plaque and Calculus: What is it?

**PLAQUE**

- Controlling plaque is extremely important in the control of decay and gum disease. Plaque is a clear, sticky deposit of bacteria that adheres to the surface of teeth and gum tissue. It is so adherent that it can only be removed by mechanical cleansing. Plaque contains a variety of different types of bacteria. For this reason, certain types of plaque are associated with dental decay, others with calculus (hardened plaque, tartar) formation, and others with the inflammatory response of the gums (gingivitis).

**CALCULUS (TARTAR)**

- Plaque which is not removed regularly by brushing and flossing can harden into calculus (also called tartar). Calculus is plaque that has mineralised, forming a tough, crusty deposit that can only be removed by your dentist or hygienist. These deposits can form above (supragingival) and below (subgingival) the gum line. Calculus deposits are a significant contributing factor in periodontal disease because it is always covered by a layer of nonmineralised plaque. The calculus keeps the plaque close to the gingival tissue and makes it much more difficult to remove the plaque bacteria. Thorough removal of these deposits is necessary to prevent the progression of periodontal disease.

Some people form heavy calculus deposits rapidly while others form little or no mineralised deposits. This is due to differences in the saliva, the types of plaque bacteria, and dietary factors. One can help reduce the formation of calculus by having regular professional cleanings every 6 months or more frequently as recommended by your dentist or hygienist.