

# Periodontal Gum Disease

If you have the following signs:

- Swollen and puffy gums
- Bleeding gums
- Bad breath
- Receding gums
- Gaps appearing between your teeth
- Loose teeth
- Teeth that are drifting

It is highly likely that you have gum disease. This disease is often "silent" (painless) and can progress unnoticed for many years. It usually starts off innocuously as swollen and bleeding gums which comes and goes often with no pain. However over the years that it is not treated the persistent inflammatory condition will progress on to destroy bone which supports the teeth. It is this slow destruction that eventually leads to teeth being loose and the unfortunate end result is the loss of the teeth.

It all starts off with dental plaque which is a clear, sticky film on the surface of your teeth and gums. If not removed through daily brushing and flossing it becomes hard and known as tartar, which cannot be removed by your toothbrush. This tartar or "scale" will continue to build up and sometimes will build up beneath the level of the gum line. This tartar also become a habitat where bacteria associated with gum disease can proliferate and produces toxins that irritate the gums.

To protect the body from the toxins, the body mounts and inflammatory response to deal with the growing population of bacteria and as indicated before, a prolonged inflammation process will start bone loss.

Recent studies have indicated a link between poor oral health and poor general health. Gum disease is the leading cause of tooth loss in adults and has been associated with cardiovascular disease, stroke and pre-term low birth-weight babies.

The management of periodontal disease requires can be divided into several parts:

1. Periodontal charting and diagnosis:

- This is where the dentist will measure the depth of the gum pocket which gives an indication to the amount of bone loss. In each tooth, we will take measurements in 6 points and this is charted on to our computer program.
- Once this is done a diagnosis is made and the severity of the disease documented. From here a treatment strategy is formulated and explained to the patient

2. The first stage in the management of gum diseases is the explanation and education of the patient as to the cause of the disease and also the home care regimen that has to be followed for a successful result

3. Initial treatment usually involve “scaling and root planning” usually with local anesthetics. It is common to divide the treatment into 4 sections representing the 4 quarters of the patients upper and lower jaw. This all depends on the severity of the disease.

- Root planning involves getting very small specialized instruments that will go underneath the gum to remove the scale and to “plane” the root smooth. This removed bacteria and toxins and provides a clean surface where hopefully some attachment of the gum tissue will occur to the root surface forming a “seal”
- In cases where there is pus coming from the gum pockets, the treatment may be done together with a course of antibiotics.

4. A review appointment will then be organized to check the healing process usually 3-4 months after initial therapy. It is anticipated that if the patient is meticulous with their oral hygiene, a successful result will occur.

- Sometimes, certain areas where deep pockets were initially diagnosed may not respond as well to conventional treatment. In such cases we may undertake a surgical approach in an attempt to rectify the situation.

The success of periodontal treatment is very much dependent on the patient's motivation to help by maintaining a high standard of oral hygiene. Smoking will affect the healing process and in many cases will contribute to the further deterioration of the periodontal status.

Regular maintenance visits are essential to the long term success of the treatment and your dentist will advise you on the frequency of the visits based on risk factors that you present with.