

Gum disease is inflammation and infection of the tissues supporting the teeth. There are two main forms of gum disease: gingivitis and periodontitis. Gingivitis affects the gums alone and is usually reversible however periodontitis is more serious and affects the bone supporting the teeth.

Am I likely to suffer from gum disease?

Most of the adult population suffers from some form of gum disease and it is the major cause of tooth loss in adults. However, gum disease usually progresses very slowly and with monitoring, advice and treatment most people are able to keep most of their teeth for life.

What is the cause of gum disease?

Gum disease is caused by plaque. Plaque is a film of bacteria which forms on the surface of the teeth and gums. To prevent and treat gum disease, you need to make sure that you remove all the plaque from your teeth every day. This is usually done by brushing & flossing but your dentist may also recommend other techniques.

Are there other factors that contribute to gum disease?

Smoking is a significant risk factor, as is a family history of gum disease. Diabetes and some medications can also increase your chances of getting gum disease. However, the main cause for most people is plaque – caused by poor teeth cleaning at home.

What happens if gum disease is not treated?

As gum disease progresses the bone supporting the teeth is lost. The gums and bone will become infected – sometimes causing bad breath and a bad taste. Eventually the teeth will become loose and will need to be removed. Gum disease usually does not hurt until it is fairly advanced.

How do I know if I have gum disease?

You should have regular dental examinations – your dentist will tell you how healthy your gums are. If your gums bleed regularly when brushing or eating, if you have loose teeth or if you have a discharge from your gums then you should contact your dentist for an appointment.

What treatments are needed?

Your dentist will examine your gums and measure where the gums have become loose around the teeth – x-rays may also be taken. You will then be shown how to remove the plaque successfully yourself using various methods. Daily home care is the most important aspect of the treatment of gum disease and other treatment will have little effect unless home cleaning is perfect and regular.



What else can be done?

Once you are cleaning your teeth effectively and regularly, your dentist or hygienist may need to carry out further cleaning of the roots of the teeth, to make sure the last deposits of bacteria are removed. This may need to be done with the aid of a local anaesthetic. Afterwards, you may feel some discomfort for a few days. Antibiotics are also sometimes prescribed.

Once I have had periodontal disease treated, can I get it again?

If you have already lost bone around the teeth, this bone will not be able to grow back fully. If you maintain perfect cleaning, any further loss of bone should be slow and may stop altogether. However, you must make sure that you remove all your plaque every day and return for regular examinations with the dentist.

The daily cleaning of your teeth, using prescribed methods, is by far the most important factor in the treatment of gum disease. If you do not completely remove all plaque from all the surfaces of your teeth daily (including between the teeth and under the gum), any other treatment that we can provide for you is unlikely to be effective.