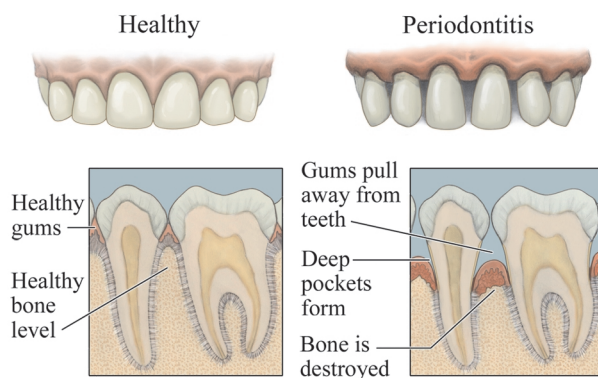


Gum Disease



What is gum disease?

Gum disease occurs when bacteria (germs) infect the gums and bones around the teeth. This causes the soft gum tissues to pull away from the teeth, and it eventually causes the bone to wear away. Gum disease also is called periodontal disease.

Bacteria and food cause gum disease. A clear, sticky, almost invisible substance called plaque is always forming on your teeth and gums. Plaque contains bacteria. As they feed on the sugars in the food you eat, the bacteria cause the gums to break down. Your body also makes enzymes to fight the bacteria. But these enzymes also damage your teeth and gums.

There are two types of gum disease—gingivitis and periodontitis:

- **Gingivitis** is mild and only affects your gums. It causes your gums to bleed and become swollen.
- **Periodontitis** occurs when gingivitis gets worse. The bacteria spread below the gum line and begin to damage the bone and soft tissues that support the teeth. If you do not

treat periodontitis, your teeth may become loose, fall out, or need to be removed.

What makes gum disease more likely?

You are more likely to have gum disease if:

- You do not brush and floss your teeth regularly or well enough to remove plaque.
- You smoke or use smokeless (spit) tobacco. Tobacco use makes you more likely to have serious gum disease that results in tooth loss.
- Gum disease runs in your family. If it does, you are much more likely than normal to develop gum disease, even if you take good care of your teeth and gums.
- You are a female experiencing the hormonal changes of puberty, menopause, or pregnancy.
- You have a disease that reduces how well you fight infection, such as uncontrolled diabetes or AIDS.
- You are under a lot of stress. Stress can weaken your immune system and make you more likely to develop infections.
- You eat a diet that is low in vitamins and minerals or high in sugary foods and other carbohydrates (grains, pasta, bread).
- You take certain medicines. These include seizure-control drugs, calcium channel blockers, cyclosporine, birth control pills, or medicines used to treat cancer (chemotherapy).

What are the symptoms?

Healthy gums are pink and firm, fit snugly around the teeth, and do not bleed easily.

Gingivitis causes gums to pull away from the teeth and become red, swollen, and tender. They may bleed easily during brushing or flossing or even if you press the gums with your finger.

In periodontitis, the gums start to pull away from the teeth, leaving deep pockets where bacteria can grow and damage the bone that supports the teeth. The gums may also pull back, making the teeth look longer. You may have lasting bad breath or notice pus coming from your gums. Teeth may become loose, fall out, or have to be removed.

Treatment

Treatment depends on how severe your gum disease is.

Gingivitis

- You can often cure gingivitis by regularly brushing your teeth and flossing. Brush your teeth two times a day, in the morning and before bedtime, and floss one time a day. In some cases, your dentist may give you antibiotics to fight the bacteria in your gums and mouth.

Periodontitis

- Tartar is a hard substance that can build up around your gums. Your dentist will remove the plaque and tartar above and below your gum line. This is called root planing and

scaling. It makes it harder for plaque to stick to the teeth.

- Your dentist may give you medicine that keeps enzymes from damaging the gums and bones. This is called enzyme suppression. It is usually used along with root planing and scaling.
- Your dentist may give you antibiotics to kill bacteria and stop the infection.

Surgery

You may need surgery if other treatments do not control the infection or you already have severe damage to your gums or teeth.

- Gingivectomy removes and reshapes loose gum tissue to get rid of the holes between the teeth and gums where plaque is found.
- A flap procedure allows your dentist to clean the roots of a tooth and repair bone and soft-tissue damage.
- You may need to have some teeth removed.

After surgery, you may need to take antibiotics or other medicines to aid healing and prevent infection. You will also need to brush well after all meals and snacks and to floss daily.