

Prevent Periodontal Disease

The best way to treat periodontal disease is to stop it before it occurs. This means brushing at least twice a day, everyday, as well as flossing one or more times a day, everyday. Also, staying on top of your scheduled cleanings will help you and your dentist to keep your gums healthy.

In the event that life happens and you begin to show signs of this gum disease, take peace in knowing that it is treatable and sought out help can reduce further spread.

What is it?

Periodontal disease is sometimes referred to as gum disease. It refers to an infection of the gums that ultimately affects the bones in your jaw that support your teeth.

Like a cuff, pink, thriving gums fit perfectly around each tooth. As a person develops periodontal disease, said cuffs begin to pull away from the teeth. As the gums pull away, spaces are left between the gums and the teeth. Dentists refer to these spaces as pockets. Eventually, the pockets grow deep and fill with infection, which eats away at the bone, which ultimately affects the teeth. Untreated periodontal disease can result in tooth loss.

Connections

Individuals suffering from heart disease, AIDS, stroke, diabetes, low immune systems, and high stress have all been linked to periodontal disease. These individuals are at much higher risk for developing disease within their gums.

Symptoms

While periodontal disease is not always 100% visible, there are some warning signs typically. If you notice you have any of the symptoms below, it would be beneficial for you to check in with your dentist.

- 1) Your gums bleed when you brush your teeth or floss your teeth.
- 2) Often times, your gums have a swollen, red, or tender appearance/feel.
- 3) You can physically see that your gums have pulled away from your teeth.
- 4) You constantly have bad breath—no matter what.
- 5) Pus or discharge leaves the tissue area between your teeth and gums.
- 6) Your bite is off and your teeth no longer fit together the way they used to.
- 7) Your partial dentures no longer fit properly.

How do I get periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease happens when plaque gets down into the pockets between your teeth and hardens. In plaque, bacteria exist. The bacteria irritate and inflame your gums. Down in those pockets bacteria has the chance to grow and spread, because it's dark and wet and you cannot reach it with a toothbrush. Eventually, these bacteria cause infection.

Back to Prevention

You want to do everything in your power to avoid periodontal disease. Most of the prevention happens at home.

Diet: What kinds of foods do you consume? Are they sticky and sugary? Do they sit in your mouth for a while before eating them? Eliminate candies, sugars, cakes, and treats. Fill your plate with colorful vegetables and lean proteins. This will help reduce periodontal disease from the get-go.

Brush: Establish healthy patterns and routines. Before you go anywhere in the morning, brush your teeth for two minutes. Before retiring to bed, brush your teeth for two minutes and if time allows, brush in between meals. These patterns will help break up the plaque on your teeth before it has the chance to harden. It is also recommended that you brush at least twice a week for two minutes with fluoridated toothpaste. This adds further protection.

Floss: Who knew that string could be so powerful? By flossing after you brush each day, you remove anything that might have become wedged in your teeth. You further break up plaque, and you strengthen/toughen up your gums. A person who consistently flosses each day is far less likely to develop periodontal disease than someone who rarely flosses or foregoes this process.

Check-up's: Schedule and attend your bi-annual visits to the dentist. This allows you to be assessed by a dental professional, and helps you to learn new things that might help you in your prevention process. Some insurance plans allow individuals to go three or four times to the dentist in one year. Take advantage of these benefits!

Am I more likely to get periodontal disease?

Anyone, any age can develop gum disease. However, some individuals, given specific circumstances, definitely have a higher risk.

- Poor oral hygiene habits
- Tobacco users
- Diseases like AIDS, diabetes, heart disease, etc.
- Medications like blood pressure medicine, steroids, etc.
- Birth Control Users
- Genes

- Saliva passed between parents to children or partner to partner

Stages

Stage 1 is thought of as healthy gums. The gums appear to be a light pink color, they bounce back when prodded, and they properly fit/cushion the teeth, which they support. This causes the teeth to sit firmly in place.

Stage 2 is gingivitis or the beginning stages of periodontal disease. In this stage, the gums often bleed. They have a swollen look about them and appear to be red. A patient may report sensitivity when she brushes or flosses.

Stage 3 is noted as periodontitis. This stage observes a great deal of built-up plaque on the teeth and in between the teeth. Additionally, much of this plaque has hardened and become tartar. A person with this stage will begin to lose bone that supports her teeth.

Stage 4 is called advanced periodontitis. The gums pull away from the teeth quite easily, as more bone loss has occurred. The periodontal ligaments are damaged. Once to this stage, a dentist may recommend tooth extraction to avoid further bone loss and infection.

Probing for Periodontal Disease

Around age 25-30, your dentist will begin recommending periodontal probing. This is completely standard to ensure that your gums around your teeth are healthy and in good condition. The dentist/hygienist will gently stick a tool called a periodontal probe into the spaces between your gums and your teeth.

The purpose of this probing is to measure how deep these spaces are. You want your spaces to be less than 3 mm in depth. Anything greater than that has cause for concern, because it means bacteria can get down to the root of the tooth and put you at risk for infection and bone loss.

Aside from the probing, the doctor will also take a series of x-rays. These x-rays confirm the doctor's findings, as well as shed light on anything missed during the exam.

Deep Cleaning Treatment

After your exam, your dental provider will decide if treatment is necessary. Typically, this means the doctor may order a special cleaning for you called a scaling and root planing. This deep clean takes longer than a regular cleaning and involves the doctor carefully and gently scaling each tooth. Basically, she takes this little hook and removes the plaque and tartar build-up below the gum-line. After scaling,

she root planes the tooth root to smooth everything out, so that the gums will re-attach to the tooth.

Upon completion of the deep cleaning, the doctor will administer some sort of antibiotic to the infected area to be sure that no more bacteria grow. Then, you will be asked to come back a month to a few months later to check how your pockets responded to the treatment. At that point, you will either receive more treatment or be set up for a maintenance plan.

Maintenance plans might go something like this: deep cleaning one month, regular cleaning three months later, deep cleaning three months later, etc. It will just depend on the condition of your disease and how progressed it is.

Pending Surgery

Sometimes teeth do not respond after a deep cleaning the way a dentist hopes. In these instances, periodontal surgery may be necessary. The doctor will go deep into the pockets to remove any left over plaque. After the bone is contoured, the surgeon will stitch the gums into place, so that the tissue is like a cuff again. This allows the pocket depth to be reduced and return to a healthy stage.

Many times, because of excessive bone loss, the surgeon needs to rebuild or reshape the bone. Typically, after these kinds of surgeries, the doctor will prescribe a bite guard or a splint. This helps hold any loose teeth in place, while also allowing the tissue to heal.

Additionally, the doctor may feel it necessary to place a membrane layer to the area of concern. This aids the gums to stay put while the roots of the tooth reattach. Another name for this process is “guided tissue regeneration”.

There are a number of scenarios and treatment plans and solutions to resolve periodontal issues. The bottom line is don't ever feel hopeless about your situation. Science has come a long way to improve oral health to preserve and keep your teeth.

Remember

Prevention is the best policy, but if you get into a bind and find yourself facing an advanced stage of periodontal disease, seek out the proper professional help. There are a number of things you can continue to do at home, in conjunction with your dental team.

- Brush
- Floss
- Eat Healthy
- Give Up Tobacco
- See Your Dentist Regularly

- Manage Your Health/Medications