



Dental

Protect your mouth from gum disease



Gum disease is a serious but often painless disease. Many people don't know they have it until the damage has been done. Research links gum disease to diabetes and heart disease. If you catch gum disease early, you can protect your teeth and gums. You may even help protect your overall health.

The first stage of gum disease: gingivitis.

Gingivitis is the mildest form of gum disease. Signs of gingivitis include red, swollen gums that bleed when you brush or floss.

You can reverse gingivitis if you:

- Brush daily
- Floss daily
- Get regular cleanings

You should know:

- Gum disease is an infection of the gums. Your gums hold your teeth in place.
- Many people don't realize they have gum disease until damage has been done.
- If you catch it early, you can treat gum disease without surgery.

The second stage of gum disease: periodontitis.

If you don't get gingivitis under control, it can lead to periodontitis. Periodontitis is an infection of the gum tissues that hold your teeth in place.

Germs, called bacteria, are part of a sticky film that covers your teeth called plaque. Built-up plaque on your teeth can harden — this is called tartar. The tartar hardens under the gum line. The gums then pull away from the teeth, creating a pocket. These pockets allow additional germs to gather. This deepens the pockets and can lead to bone and tooth loss.

How to treat gum disease.

Your dentist will tell you if you have gum disease. Your dentist may be able to treat gum disease, especially in its early stages. For more advanced stages, you may need to see a gum specialist. A gum specialist is called a “periodontist.”

In the early stages of gum disease, your dentist will do a deep cleaning. This will remove hardened plaque and infected tissue. It will also smooth the damaged root surfaces of the teeth. This process allows the gum to heal.

After a deep cleaning, it's important to brush and floss regularly. This will keep the plaque from building up again. If the periodontitis gets worse, gum surgery may be necessary.

Gum disease is a serious but treatable disease. It can affect your oral health and your overall health. Be sure to practice good daily habits at home and take advantage of your dental plan benefits. Go to the dentist regularly. If you take care of your teeth and gums, they will last a lifetime.

Signs of advanced gum disease:

- Bleeding gums when you brush or floss
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that pull away from the teeth
- Pus that appears between the teeth and gums when you press on the gums
- Bad breath
- Permanent teeth that are loose or moving away from each other
- Changes in how your teeth fit together
- Changes in how dentures or a bridge fits



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