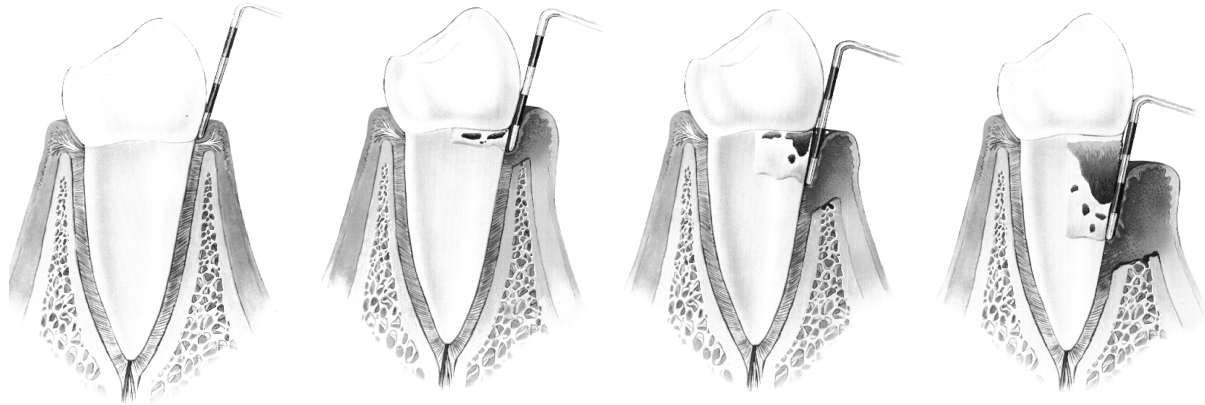


Gum Disease



Healthy tooth & gums

Gingivitis

Early Periodontitis

Advanced Periodontitis

How can I tell if I have gum disease?

Healthy gums are pale pink and firm. If yours are red and swollen, or bleed easily, you probably have gum disease. Often there is bad breath (halitosis) as well.

What causes it?

Gum disease is usually caused by a build up of dental plaque. Plaque is the sticky layer that builds up on the surface of your teeth and gums if not cleaned adequately. It contains large amounts of bacteria, some of these are harmful and cause inflammation of the gums. This inflammation is called gingivitis. If plaque is left on the teeth it can absorb mineral salts in the saliva and form a hard layer of tartar (calculus) which cannot be removed with normal brushing. The bacteria in the tartar continue to attack the tissues that support the tooth roots and in advanced cases the bone loss can cause teeth to become loose. This more advanced stage is called periodontitis.

Who does it affect?

Gingivitis and Periodontitis can affect anyone at any age, although it is less likely to be seen in young children. Mild cases can go unnoticed for some time, and there may be no symptoms during the early stages of the disease. Gingivitis, if left untreated, can progress to periodontitis.

What can be done about it?

Gum disease can be treated by your dentist or hygienist who will clean your teeth professionally and advise you on how to improve your tooth cleaning at home. The earlier this treatment starts the better, as more advanced periodontitis is much harder to treat, and bone that has been lost does not usually return. Basic periodontal treatment involves removing the plaque and tartar using hand instruments and/or advanced ultrasonic cleaning machines, sometimes using a local anaesthetic. This is usually followed by a polish. This procedure may need to be repeated regularly to clean areas you find difficult to keep clean at home. It is important to remember that correct cleaning at home is the most effective way of treating gum disease, your dental professional only sees you a few times a year, the rest of the time it's up to you! Gum problems are also made worse by smoking, and your dental professional may encourage you to stop.

Sometimes this basic periodontal treatment is not enough to get gum disease under control and referral to a specialist may be required. In advanced periodontal disease there may be so much bone lost that removal of the worst affected teeth is necessary to prevent more bone loss, and sometimes inflamed gums may need surgery to recontour them and make them easier to clean.