



British Society of
Periodontology

Periodontal health for a better life.



Gum health facts

About gum disease

Before we launch into the science of gum disease, it's important to know that, despite it being one of the most wide-spread diseases across the world, it is preventable and can be easily treated when it is found early enough.

Periodontal disease, another name for gum disease is caused by bacteria that collects at the gum line as dental plaque. The plaque needs to be removed by brushing and cleaning between the teeth twice a day. If not properly cleaned, the gum starts to come away from the tooth, forming pockets and the plaque grows down below the gum line. Over time, the bone that supports the teeth is destroyed, the gums shrink and eventually the teeth become wobbly and fall out. That's the science!

Who can get gum disease?

Most people can get mild gum disease but some people are susceptible to more aggressive forms. Severe gum disease, especially if you have it at a young age, can run in families.

There are a few factors that put people at higher risk of getting severe gum disease. These include: ■ diabetes (especially if poorly controlled) ■ smoking (possibly including e-cigarettes) ■ stress ■ a poor diet lacking in vitamins and minerals ■ obesity ■ certain medications.



Do you have periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is usually pain-free (sometimes called 'the silent disease') and so you may be unaware of it until your dentist or hygienist checks for it.

Here are some 'red flags'

- symptoms you may notice that should raise concerns:

- ▶ Bleeding gums when brushing or even whilst eating
- ▶ Red, swollen gums
- ▶ Bad breath
- ▶ Spaces appearing between teeth
- ▶ Loose teeth or teeth moving position in the mouth
- ▶ Receding gums
- ▶ Sensitivity to cold or hot foods and drinks



Stages of gum disease



Ask your dentist to explain this, in particular in relation to your own BPE score. Your BPE score is a measure of your gum health and should be a standard part of your routine dental examination.

Medical conditions

Please make sure you tell your dentist about any problems with your health and about any tablets or medicines you are taking.

Some medical conditions may change the way your dentist/hygienist manages your disease and some medication may change the appearance of your gums.

What does treatment involve?

Treatment aims to reduce bacteria around your teeth and prevent the disease from getting worse. Generally though, treatment cannot replace the support your teeth have already lost.

- You will be taught the best methods of cleaning your teeth and gums to remove dental plaque. Treatment will only work if you clean your teeth properly, twice a day, to a high standard
- You need to clean daily between your teeth with interdental brushes - or floss if the gaps between teeth are too tight for brushes
- You should use a small headed toothbrush or a good quality power brush - your dentist can advise you
- The tartar above the gum-line can be removed by your dentist/hygienist
- Any bacteria below the gum line can be removed by your dentist/hygienist deep cleaning your teeth. You can ask for an injection to make your gums and teeth numb if you prefer
- Mouthwashes may help with very mild gum disease but may mask more serious gum disease



What are the benefits of treatment?

Your gums will be healthier and you may notice such benefits as

- greater confidence of a fresher mouth
- gums not being sore or bleeding when you brush
- teeth becoming less wobbly
- less discomfort when you eat
- and ultimately, you will keep your teeth for longer

Success depends on how well you clean your teeth and how your gums respond. Cleaning thoroughly twice a day and regular dental visits are good habits to adopt for life.

What can you expect after treatment?

- Your gums are likely to bleed more to start with - don't worry and keep cleaning as this is normal and will improve
- As they become healthier your gums may shrink. Spaces may appear between the teeth and they may appear longer
- As gums shrink, your teeth may become more sensitive to hot, cold or sweet things. Usually this gets better in a few weeks, but you might need to use a special sensitivity toothpaste or have other treatment to help with this

What are the available alternatives?

Results of no treatment

- The gum disease is likely to get worse
- Your teeth could become wobbly with gaps appearing between your teeth
- Your breath will not improve
- Your gums and teeth could become painful
- You are highly likely to lose your teeth sooner

Extractions

Removal (extraction) of teeth may be an acceptable alternative treatment if your disease is severe.

- You may wish to have replacements for any lost teeth by means of a denture, bridge or an implant. Implants are only recommended if the gum disease is no longer present
- People find it easier and more enjoyable to eat with natural teeth rather than replacements
- Extractions would reduce the time spent treating your gums
- An extraction would remove a painful tooth quickly
- If your front teeth have a poor appearance, a denture or a bridge may look better

Smoking considerations:

If you smoke tobacco you should do your best to give up - there are plenty of organisations that can help. Smokers who continue to smoke:

- are more likely to get gum disease
- may find their gum disease gets worse quite quickly
- are less likely to get better after treatment
- are more likely to have a recurrence of gum disease following treatment

Did you know...

Gum disease is completely treatable if diagnosed early enough

Over half the population has gum disease, often without knowing

Gum disease is linked to a number of health conditions including diabetes

Gum disease can lead to bad breath, loose teeth and painful gums if left untreated



BSP

British Society of
Periodontology

More information on gum health and periodontal disease can be found at: bsperio.org.uk/patients

© BSP 2017



Always ask your dentist about your gum health as well as your teeth - without gums, there can be no teeth!