



What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal (gum) disease is a bacterial infection of the tissues and bone surrounding and supporting the teeth. In fact, periodontal disease is the leading cause of tooth loss among adults in the United States. There are many types of periodontal diseases and they can affect individuals of all ages from children to adults.

What causes the destruction of tooth supporting tissue?

Healthy gum tissue is pink and fits snugly around each tooth. It can be harmed by *plaque*, a sticky film of bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. If plaque is not removed, minerals that are present in saliva are absorbed by the plaque. As a result, the once home cleanable plaque forms a rough, hardened material called *calculus (tartar)* that can only be removed professionally. The plaque and calculus causes irritation to the tissues that support your teeth. This irritation can lead to chronic inflammation, bleeding, and infection that can destroy your gum and bone tissue.

Gingivitis

The early stage of periodontal disease is termed gingivitis. Gingivitis will cause the gums to become red, swollen and may bleed easily during toothbrushing. The good news is that this early stage of periodontal disease is reversible by improved oral hygiene and regular dental visits to remove calculus above the gum line.

Periodontitis

Periodontitis occurs when inflammation caused by plaque byproducts destroys the tissues that anchor teeth in the bone. As the disease progresses, pockets form, allowing more plaque and calculus to collect below the gum line. Unless treated the affected teeth may become loose and may even require removal by a dentist.



Warning signs

If you notice any of these signs, see your dentist:

- Gums that bleed during toothbrushing and flossing
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- Persistent bad breath
- Pus between your teeth and gums
- Loose or separating teeth
- A change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- A change in the fit of partial dentures
- Exposed tooth roots

Periodontal diseases are often painless and may have few warning signs. That's one reason why regular dental visits and professional teeth cleanings are so important.

How is periodontal disease prevented?

Prevention is your first line of defense, which includes a daily oral hygiene routine at home and regular dental checkups. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and cleaning between teeth once a day with floss or another interdental cleaner help prevent tartar from forming. If these measures are not taken, the likelihood of disease increases. In some cases, even with good oral hygiene, a certain percentage of patients experience some form of periodontal disease that must be treated. Tobacco cessation can also greatly improve the health of your gums.

