



Gum Disease

Gum disease is the layman's term for Periodontitis. Periodontitis causes the bone, ligament and gum to be lost around your teeth. If left untreated it can lead to loose teeth and eventually tooth loss.

Inflammation in your gums is one of the body's natural defence mechanisms to plaque (now known as **BIOFILM**) on the teeth. In some people this inflammation can be too severe and damages the supporting structures of the teeth, namely bone, ligament and gum.

What are the symptoms?

You may get bleeding gums, an unpleasant taste in your mouth, receding gums and loose teeth. Surprisingly it is rarely painful but may lead to dental abscesses if left untreated.

Do I have it?

About 15% of the population are severely affected and milder forms of the condition affect 80% of people by the age of 60. It is known as a genetically inherited condition with trends running in families.

What about smoking?

You are 4 times more likely to have periodontitis if you smoke. Smoking is known to accelerate the damage caused and make treatment less successful. The amount you smoke is in direct proportion to the damage caused so reducing or, better still, stopping smoking is essential if you wish to keep your teeth.

If you suffer with Periodontitis you can help yourself by:

- Removing **ALL** the biofilm from your teeth once a day. This means brushing all of your teeth and cleaning between your teeth with special 'interdental' brushes or dental floss. This should take about 5 to 10 minutes.

THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO. IF YOU DO NOT DO THIS THEN YOU CAN LOSE YOUR TEETH.

- Use good quality fluoride toothpaste.
- Visit your Dental Hygienist at least every 3 months. Research shows that if your teeth are professionally cleaned to remove all calculus (tartar) and the biofilm from below the gum every 3 months then you are far less likely to lose your teeth.
- Quit smoking.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet.

What do hygienists do?

Our hygienists are highly trained to:

- Record in detail the extent of the damage around each tooth.
- Show you how to remove **ALL** the biofilm from your teeth and which products to use.
- Remove biofilm and calculus (tartar).
- Remove staining.

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Our hygienists are trained in the use of local anaesthetic so treatment can be carried out painlessly if your teeth are particularly sensitive.

What else can be done?

Sometimes we advise antibiotics and occasionally surgery. During surgery we can try to regenerate the bone and/or gum you have lost around your teeth. We may also consider referring you to a Specialist in Periodontology.

Can you cure this?

Periodontitis can be controlled but not cured. Similar to diabetes there is no cure but by controlling the inflammation we can limit further damage and allow you to keep your teeth for a long time.

How to reduce inflammation at home

Periodontitis is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the supporting bone and tissues around teeth. The inflammatory reaction is your body's way of removing the toxins released by the bacteria that live on your teeth and gums. However, when the inflammation lasts for too long or is too strong, it starts to break down the tissues around your teeth, including your gums and supporting bone. This may cause teeth to become loose and even fall out.

Unfortunately inflammation doesn't only occur in your mouth. Several other serious conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis are caused by the same chronic inflammation that causes periodontitis.

The good news is that your dental professional can help you reduce the inflammation in your mouth as a result of periodontitis through treatments such as scaling, polishing and deep cleaning of the teeth and roots.

You can also help reduce the inflammation in your mouth and even in your entire body right at home. Here are a few things you can try:

Eat the right foods

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as oily cold-water fish (salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel and sardines) and walnuts, have been shown to reduce inflammation. Green tea, which also contains anti-oxidants, has been shown to reduce the risk of periodontitis and cardiovascular disease. Reduce consumption of refined sugar as this increases inflammation and is of little nutritional value.

Exercise

People who maintain a healthy body weight and exercise regularly have been shown to have lower incidences of periodontitis than those who do not exercise regularly.

Moderate exercise may also help reduce inflammation in your entire body but extreme exercise (running a marathon for example) can actually increase inflammation. It is a good idea to discuss your exercise plan with a health professional to ensure that it is appropriate for your lifestyle.

What are omega-3 fatty acids?

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Omega 3 fatty acids are unsaturated fats that our bodies cannot make by themselves. Therefore omega-3s must come from things we eat, which is why it is important to eat a balanced diet. Omega-3s are vital for metabolism and brain function and also help to reduce inflammation in the body. Research has shown that omega-3 fatty acids can help treat or prevent several conditions.

Brush and clean in between your teeth

When you brush and clean in between your teeth every day you remove the bacteria from your teeth and gums that causes the inflammatory response that leads to periodontitis. Therefore, daily cleaning in between your teeth using special 'interdental' brushes is essential for treating and preventing gum disease. Floss is of little value unless the spaces between your teeth are too tight for interdental brushes to fit without hurting or causing harm. It is important to see your dental professional for regular examinations and hygiene visits which include screening for periodontitis.

Further information about Gum Disease is available from the British Society of Periodontology and Dental implants. <https://www.bsperio.org.uk/patients>