

About periodontal (gum) disease

Periodontal disease is caused by the bacteria (germs) which live in your mouth. The bacteria stick to your teeth and if they are not removed regularly will irritate the gums. This disease may destroy the attachment of the gum to the tooth forming a “pocket” between the gum and tooth. Bacteria can live in the pockets beneath the gum-line. The disease may also destroy the bone which supports your teeth and this may mean that your teeth become loose and may eventually fall out.

Who can get gum disease?



All people can get mild gum disease but some people get more severe gum disease than others. Severe gum disease at a young age can run in families. People who smoke tobacco are more likely to get severe gum disease than people who do not smoke. Patients who have diabetes may also experience more severe gum disease if their diabetes is not under good control.

Can the disease be treated and what will treatment involve?

Treatment is based on controlling the bacteria. In most people, the treatment aims to prevent the disease from getting worse and can not replace the support your teeth have already lost.

- You can be taught the best methods of cleaning your teeth and gums to remove bacteria. Treatment will only work well if you clean your teeth thoroughly every day and if you have severe gum disease you may need to clean your teeth better than someone with less severe disease
- The “tartar” (calculus) from above the gum-line can be removed by cleaning (scaling) the teeth
- Patients may use a small headed manual toothbrush or an oscillating-rotating power brush
- If the disease has already destroyed some of the support for your teeth bacteria and calculus can be removed from under the gum-line by cleaning (scaling and root debridement) your teeth. If cleaning is uncomfortable an injection can make the gum and teeth numb
- Your response to treatment can be monitored at a future appointment to check whether your gum condition has improved
- If you have had gum disease treated, you need to continue cleaning your teeth very well and should have your gum condition checked regularly.

What are the benefits of treatment?

Your gums will become healthier which will help you keep your teeth longer. The improvements will depend on how good your cleaning becomes and how severe your disease was to start with.

- If your gums bleed, are red or are swollen this will reduce
- If your gums are sore, treatment should help
- If your teeth feel loose they may feel firmer after treatment
- Your breath may become fresher.

What are the risks / side effects / complications?

- The gums occasionally feel sore after scaling but should feel better after a few days
- Your teeth may become more sensitive to hot, cold or sweet substances. Usually this decreases within a few weeks, but sometimes you may need to use a special toothpaste or have other treatment
- As the gums become healthier they may shrink or recede. Sometimes spaces may appear between the teeth and the teeth may appear longer.

What are the available alternatives and their risks / benefits?

No treatment.

The result of not having treatment will depend on how severe your disease is.

- With no treatment the gum disease could get worse
- Your teeth could become painful
- You may lose your teeth sooner.

Extractions

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

- This may mean you need a replacement such as a denture, bridge or implant
- Some people find it easier and more enjoyable to eat with natural teeth than a denture
- 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.

How will I know if I have gum disease?

You may notice that

- your gums are red and swollen
- your gums bleed easily when you clean your teeth or even bite into hard foods
- you have bad breath.

STAGES OF PERIODONTITIS:



At the early stages of the disease you may not notice that you have a problem, particularly if you smoke tobacco. However, your dentist can detect gum disease even in its early stages. Once the disease is severe it becomes more difficult to treat successfully.

With severe disease

- your teeth may become loose
- your gums may recede, making the teeth appear longer
- the front teeth may move forward and spaces may open up between them.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Smoking

- *Smoking. If you smoke tobacco you should quit smoking. Gum treatment does not work as well in smokers as non-smokers*
- *Gum recession. There are many causes of gum recession, which your dentist will be able to investigate.*

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 appearance of your gums and some may change the advice and information that your dentist gives you.*

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More information about periodontal disease may be found at

www.bsperio.org.uk/patients



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Facts about gum health