

A COMMON SENSE LOOK AT...

Gum Disease

Treatment

The type of treatment you require depends on how advanced your particular case is. **Individualized treatment may include any of the following:**

- **Scaling and root planing.** Scaling is removing the calculus deposits from your teeth; root planing is the smoothing of the root surfaces so that the gum tissue can reattach to the tooth.
- **Curettage** removes the soft tissue lining the periodontal pocket. This helps the gum tissue to heal.
- **Gingivectomy** is surgical removal of the periodontal pockets when the disease does not involve the jaw bone.
- **Flap surgery** allows us to gain access to the root of the tooth for removal of calculus, plaque and diseased tissue. The gum is then secured back into place. Flap surgery is sometimes accompanied by osseous (bone) surgery, in which the bone around the tooth is reshaped or part of it is removed.

More than half of all adults ages 35 and over have the early stages of this disease. Three out of four adults are eventually affected by it. Periodontal disease is the primary cause of lost teeth after age 35. But the good news is that **there are steps you can take to prevent periodontal disease** in your mouth. If caught in its early stages, gum disease can be reversed.

A Final Word...

You need not lose your teeth to gum disease. With today's state-of-the-art treatment procedures, be assured that most teeth can be saved. Good periodontal health starts with the patient. **Here's what you can do** to prevent or control gum disease:

- **Thoroughly brush and floss** your teeth every day.
- **Eat well-balanced meals** and avoid sugary, "junk food" snacks.
- **Examine your mouth** for any early signs of gum disease.
- **Visit us at least twice a year** for a thorough cleaning and oral examination.

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Chances are that you or a family member have some stage of gum (periodontal) disease. **Relax.** While many adults do develop some degree of periodontal disease as part of the aging process, **there are some steps you can take** to prevent periodontal disease.

In this pamphlet we have compiled the latest information about periodontal health—information that you can use to **retain your smile for a lifetime.**



Healthy Gums are coral in color, firm and resilient.

What Is Periodontal Disease?

Periodontal (gum) disease is caused by **PLAQUE**, a colorless film of bacteria that forms on the teeth. Plaque is most harmful when these bacteria form into colonies — that takes about 24 hours. If not removed daily, plaque mixes with sugars and starches in the diet to form acids and other by-products in the mouth. **Plaque irritates the gums, causing them to become red, tender and swollen.** It causes the gums to bleed easily. If not removed, plaque hardens to form calculus (tartar) around the necks of the teeth.

Eventually, the tissue that attaches the gums to the teeth is destroyed by the irritants in plaque. The gums pull away from the teeth and small pockets form between the teeth and gums. These pockets become filled with more plaque. Eventually, the jawbone supporting the teeth is destroyed.

Periodontal disease is usually a slow, painless, progressive disease. Most adults with gum disease are unaware that they have it. If diagnosed early, however, the teeth can be saved.



Gingivitis: Gum tissue is inflamed and bleeds when probed.



Severe Periodontitis: Supporting gum tissues have deteriorated; tooth loosens.

Other Causes of Periodontal Disease

In addition to plaque, a number of factors cause gum disease including:

- 1. Physical and chemical irritants** — impacted food, smoking, chewing tobacco, excessive alcohol consumption, improper use of dental floss and toothpicks.
- 2. Oral conditions or habits** that cause abnormal stress on mouth tissues — badly aligned teeth, poor fitting bridges or partial dentures, defective fillings; also habits such as grinding or clenching the teeth, or chewing ice.
- 3. Unbalanced diet** — evidence shows a link between nutritional deficiency and the body's ability to fight off infection. Vitamin C deficiency has been linked to gum disease.
- 4. Pregnancy** — increased hormone levels may aggravate a condition commonly referred to as "pregnancy gingivitis."
- 5. Diseases** — diabetes, uremia, liver cirrhosis, anemia and leukemia may affect the health of your gums.

6. Certain medications — oral contraceptives, anti-epilepsy drugs, steroids and cancer therapy drugs may also affect the gums.

What Are The Signs?

- **Gums that bleed** when you brush your teeth.
- **Red, swollen or tender gums.**
- **Gums that have receded** or shrunken away from your teeth.
- **Pus between your teeth** and gums when you press your gums with your finger.
- **Teeth that seem loose** or that change position; often the front teeth tend to "fan" out.
- **A change in your bite.**
- **A change in the way your partial dentures fit.**
- **Bad breath** or a chronic bad taste in your mouth.

Diagnosis

Of course, the only way to confirm a diagnosis of periodontal disease is to **have your mouth thoroughly examined**, and the necessary oral x-rays taken. We also recommend a thorough prophylaxis (tooth cleaning) for all adults at least twice a year. At that time we may use a special instrument called a periodontal probe to measure the depth of the crevice (pocket) — the space between the tooth and the gum tissue. Pocket depth measurement, clinical examination and x-rays determine the precise extent of gum disease.

