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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GUM DISEASE

Did you know that the most common cause of tooth loss in adults is gum disease? And despite the fact that it is almost entirely preventable, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that one out of every two adults over the age of 30 in the United States has periodontal disease.

You may be surprised to learn that the human mouth is home to a wide variety of microbes. In fact, over 700 different strains of bacteria have been detected in the oral cavity. Although some of these bacteria are beneficial, there are others that are harmful to oral health. Without proper oral hygiene and routine dental care, these harmful bacteria can cause tooth decay and gum disease, compromising both your oral health and overall wellbeing.

Periodontal disease, more commonly known as gum disease, is a set of inflammatory diseases that affect the “periodontium”, which are the hard and soft tissues that surround and support your teeth. Just like tooth decay, gum disease can be attributed to the presence of harmful bacteria dental plaque and tartar that are left to accumulate around the teeth and under the gums. While in the case of tooth decay the acidic products of the plaque bacteria erode tooth structure to cause cavities, in gum disease an inflammatory response is provoked in the tissues around the teeth. If left untreated, periodontal disease can lead to gingival pocket formation, gum recession and diminishing alveolar bone with the eventual loosening and loss of teeth.

If you notice that your gums are inflamed, red, and bleed when you brush and floss, you probably have gingivitis, meaning you’re in the initial stage of gum disease. With gingivitis, none of the tissues supporting the teeth have yet been lost, and the condition can be successfully reversed with professional dental cleanings, coupled with an improved oral hygiene regimen at home. However, in the absence of professional treatment and better home care, gingivitis progresses to the next stage, which is known as periodontitis. In this stage, the connective tissue and bone that hold the teeth in place begin to break down with an increase in pocketing between the teeth and bone, gum recession, and bone loss. Without proper treatment by your dentist, periodontitis will progress from a mild to moderate loss of supporting tissue to the complete destruction of the bone around the teeth.

Some of the signs and symptoms of gum disease to be aware of include the following:



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- Inflamed and red gums
- Bleeding when brushing or flossing
- Receding gums and exposed root surfaces of the teeth
- Sensitivity to hot or cold temperatures
- Bad breath or a bad taste in the mouth
- Teeth that feel loose
- The development of new spaces between the teeth or a change in the bite
- Change in the fit of existing partial dentures
- Discharge around the teeth and gums
- Sharp or dull pain when biting down or chewing food

Although inadequate oral hygiene practices, infrequent dental checkups, and professional teeth cleanings are the main reasons for the development of gum disease, other factors can contribute to the risk. An individual may be more susceptible to periodontal disease because of genetic factors, smoking and tobacco use, harmful oral habits, misaligned teeth, poor nutrition, and stress as well as the

fluctuating hormones in pregnancy. Moreover, diseases such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and HIV infection can also increase the risk and severity of periodontal disease. It's also noteworthy that therapeutic medications for treatment of systemic disease can lay the groundwork for periodontal problems by producing side effects such as dry mouth (xerostomia) or causing the gums to enlarge.

While gingivitis can often be reversed with improved oral hygiene and professional cleanings, as periodontal disease advances, more extensive procedures are required to halt its progression. Based upon a complete assessment of your periodontal health and a review of possible contributing factors, the dentist will recommend the best options in care. Your dentist or periodontist may recommend a series of deeper cleanings involving root planing and scaling, surgical procedures to reduce pocket depth, bone or tissue grafts, laser procedures, or antimicrobial medications.

Taking care of your smile does more than keep your teeth and gums in optimal condition; good oral health also supports systemic health. In addition to being the leading cause of tooth loss in adults, researchers are finding more and more links between periodontal disease and a number of medical problems including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, respiratory problems, and adverse pregnancy outcomes such as pre-term and low birth-weight babies.

By seeing your dentist regularly for care and doing your best to eat a healthy diet and practice good oral hygiene, you can keep your smile in tip-top shape as well as protect your overall wellbeing.