

Post Op Periodontal (Gum) Disease

What is it?

Periodontal disease is inflammation of the gum tissue, caused by a bacterial infection. When bacteria invade below the gum line several things can happen. Initially, there are no symptoms. As the disease progresses, the gums may bleed or swell, or become sore. Long term results are recession, sensitivity to cold, bone loss, and eventual tooth loss. 80% of Americans have some form of periodontal disease.

The progress of the disease is tracked by the depth the bacteria invade. Your hygienist will measure these areas for you. Anything under 3mm that does not bleed is healthy tissue. Bleeding is a sign of an active infection; and pockets of 4mm or greater is a sign of a more chronic problem.

What is needed to treat it?

Initial: The bacteria hide mostly under the gums, where they are protected from more routine care. Your hygienist will need to work below the gum line to sterilize the area and remove the infection. This initial procedure is called a scaling and root planning. The goal of treatment is to use a non-surgical approach to remove the infection at the source. You can expect anywhere between 1-2 hours for this initial treatment.

1 month: After the area is treated, your gums need a healing period and the pockets will take time to regrow. You are susceptible to reinfection quickly during this initial time. To help, your hygienist may send you home with a gel or mouthwash to help keep the area clean. The area also needs to be retreated 4-6 weeks later as the gums try to regrow to remove any bacteria that might have tried to reinvade. This visit is called a periodontal maintenance and will take about an hour. This visit also allows us to show the improvement that has been made and help focus your home care in the right direction.

3 months: From this visit, the area needs to be maintained every 3 months as the deeper pockets will collect bacteria quicker than in a normal, healthy mouth. The goal of these visits is to continue or maintain the improvement and prevent reinfection.

Why is this important to my health?

Periodontal disease is an infection and inflammation process, and as such, can greatly affect the rest of the body if left untreated. Research shows that heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, Alzheimer's, Erectile Dysfunction, and pregnancy complications have all been linked to bacteria that are only found in the mouth.

What can I do to get healthier?

Floss daily – brushing can only reach certain areas, floss is designed to get below the gum line and remove the rest. A powered unit, like a WaterFlosser, can help those who have a difficult time flossing.

Mouthwash – a liquid can reach areas that a brush and floss cannot. Studies have shown Listerine Antiseptic (green liquid) to be the most effective with gum disease.

Stop Smoking/Tobacco – tobacco causes decrease blood flow in tissues and can greatly reduce the body's ability to fight off gum infections. 98% of smokers develop gum disease.

Regular professional care – No one is perfect and can reach everything on a daily basis. Bacteria will eventually build up again. According to the American Dental Association (ADA) and the American Association of Periodontology (AAP), professional care at least every 3 months is required to help maintain gum tissues.

Can I ever go back to normal?

When found in the early stages, gum disease can be reversed to the point that routine care may be enough to maintain the tissues. We will evaluate yearly to determine where your gum health is and if we can move you toward less frequent care. Moderate to later stages will have damage that cannot be reversed. Surgical options do exist to remove deeper pockets and provide a better tissue anatomy to clean. Please ask us if you have any questions.