
It is important to know that even quite severe periodontitis usually does respond to treatment.

If I have signs of periodontitis, what should I do?

- > Brush away **all** plaque on and between your teeth, and next to the gum line.
- > Use a small soft-bristle toothbrush.
- > Use dental floss to clean difficult-to-reach areas.
- > Other interdental aids such as plaque toothpicks and interdental brushes may be useful.
- > Use mouth rinses to help “loosen” plaque adhering to teeth.
- > Regular dental visits will enable your oral health professional to inform you of any treatment that is required.
- > Problem areas with brushing and flossing may also be discussed, and in some cases alternative cleaning aids suggested.

Your oral health professional may refer you to a dental specialist in gum diseases – a periodontist.

Acknowledgement:

Colgate Periodontal Education Program | Colgate Oral Care

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What is Periodontal
disease?

Gum Disease

Your oral health professional may have mentioned that you have gum disease...

What does this mean?

Is it serious?

Gum disease involves the gums, bone and other areas of support for teeth.

Gum disease may affect any age group, but is more likely to occur in adults.

Most people have times in their lives when they do not brush as effectively as usual. The plaque that may accumulate during these times may lead to infection and inflammation – signs of gum disease.

The mildest form of gum disease is called **gingivitis**. For many people, gingivitis is the most severe consequence of plaque build-up they will experience.

However, some people may develop a more destructive form of gum disease known as **periodontitis**. With this form of disease, irreversible damage may occur to your gums and other areas of support for your teeth.

Figure 1. Gingivitis

Arrows indicate areas where plaque accumulates



It is important that your oral health professional assesses whether gingivitis and/or periodontitis are present in your mouth, and to treat either disease if they are present.

What is the role of plaque?

Why is it so important?

Plaque:

- > is the major cause of gingivitis and periodontitis.
- > is a sticky, colourless film of bacteria that builds up on the teeth, particularly at the necks of teeth where they meet the gums. Accumulation may also occur in areas between the teeth that are difficult to clean. Plaque accumulation causes inflammation of the gums, which in turn may become red, swollen and prone to bleeding.

The first signs of inflammation appear for many people when the gums bleed. This may be noticed during tooth brushing or when eating certain foods such as apple.

- > Bleeding and gum redness may develop slowly, and usually with no pain.
- > The longer the build-up of plaque occurs, the more the gums may become irritated.

People may become worried when they see this area of bleeding, and brush that region less.

Plaque that remains on and between teeth may eventually thicken, harden and calcify to become **calculus** (or tartar, as it is often called).

Figure 2. Calculus



Not brushing areas where the gum is irritated is the incorrect thing to do, as it allows plaque to further accumulate.

- > Calculus will trap plaque and, if not removed, may result in further redness, bleeding and gum tenderness.

Often, along with gum bleeding and redness, you will have bad breath and a bitter taste in your mouth upon waking in the morning. Your gums may also feel “spongy” or “soft”.

Figure 3. Periodontitis



Your oral health professional is able to remove the plaque and calculus, and discuss a professional treatment program with you.

What will happen if I take no notice of my bleeding gums?

If you, along with your oral health professional, do not work at controlling the build-up of plaque and calculus in your mouth, you run the risk of developing periodontitis.

Unlike gingivitis, which can heal leaving no permanent damage, periodontitis may permanently affect the gums and teeth-supporting bone.

The damage due to periodontitis occurs episodically, that is, there are periods of time when the condition is actively destructive and other times when the disease is stable.

The aim of periodontal treatment is to maximize the periods of stability so that no further destruction of supporting tissues (for example, bone) occurs. The treatment involves removing plaque and calculus trapped in pockets under the gum and around the teeth.