

GUM DISEASE AND ROOT SURFACE DEBRIDEMENT

(deep cleaning under local anaesthetic)

What is gum disease?

Gum disease describes swelling, soreness or infection of the tissues supporting the teeth. There are two main forms of gum disease: gingivitis and periodontal disease.

What is gingivitis?

Gingivitis is inflammation of the gums, caused by plaque accumulation on the teeth. It is reversible with good oral hygiene, but if long standing, it can turn into periodontal disease.

What is periodontal disease?

Long standing gingivitis causes loss of the bone anchoring the teeth in the jaw, eventually over time making the teeth loose. If this is not treated the end result is that the teeth may eventually fall out.

Am I likely to suffer from gum disease?

The disease develops very slowly in most people, and it can be slowed down (by gum treatment and through good oral hygiene) to a rate that should allow you to keep most of your teeth for life. Unlike tooth decay, which can often be painful, gum disease can progress ***painlessly and unnoticed***. When symptoms appear the disease is often advanced. However, the inflammation can make the gum sore.

Other factors influencing periodontal disease:

Other medical conditions can affect the progression of periodontal disease such as diabetes, smoking, conditions that affect immune response and stress.

There is also evidence that there is a genetic element to gum disease, which makes some people more prone to its development than others.

What is the cause of gum disease?

All gum disease is caused by plaque. Plaque is a film of bacteria which forms on the surface of the teeth and gums every day. Many of the bacteria in plaque are completely harmless, but there are some that have been shown to be the main cause of gum disease. Plaque is constantly produced in the mouth and is not related to food. It is a very sticky substance. It is produced within three minutes after brushing, that is why, to prevent and maintain gum disease stable, you need to make sure you remove all the plaque from your teeth every day. This is done by brushing and cleaning between the teeth every day.

How will smoking affect my gums and teeth?

The gums are affected because smoking causes lack of oxygen in the bloodstream, so the infected gums fail to heal. Smoking causes gum disease to progress more rapidly than in non smokers. Smoking is one of the main risk factors for the development and progression of periodontal disease.

What happens if gum disease is not treated?

It can lead to recession, tooth mobility and tooth loss, gum abscesses, and pus may ooze from around the teeth. Over a number of years, the bone supporting the teeth can be lost. If the disease is left untreated for a long time, treatment can become more difficult.

How do I know if I have gum disease?

The first sign is bleeding when brushing, flossing, using interdental brushes or in the rinsing water when you clean your teeth; but you may not get any sign of the disease, particularly if you are a smoker.

What treatments are needed?

You will be shown, usually by the hygienist, how to remove plaque successfully yourself; cleaning all surfaces of your teeth thoroughly and effectively. Once your oral hygiene is good, you may need to have cleaning of the roots of the teeth to remove further debris and pockets of bacteria below the gumline. This is known as root surface debridement.

What are pockets?

When you have periodontal disease, the supporting tissue and bone is destroyed, forming "pockets" around the teeth. Over time, these pockets become deeper, providing a larger space for bacteria to live. As bacteria develops around the teeth, it can accumulate and advance under the gum tissue.

What is a 6 point pocket chart?

This is when a probe (dental instruments with measures on it) is inserted into the pocket so the dentist or hygienist can measure the depth of the pocketing in millimetres at 6 points around each tooth. This enables the clinician to assess and monitor the patient's condition and creates a very detailed map of the distribution of the pocketing.

Root surface debridement

The area to be treated often needs to be numbed with a local anaesthetic. This is to allow the hygienist to clean the pockets of bacteria thoroughly without you feeling any discomfort during the treatment. Afterwards, you may feel some discomfort for up to 48 hours and may be advised to take some painkillers. You may also experience some sensitivity for a few weeks after. Depending on the severity of the disease, the hygienist may require several visits.

After the treatment

Healing can take 8-12 weeks, during which your gums may become firmer and shrink slightly as the inflammation subsides. It is important that you follow your hygienist advice on what oral hygiene aids to use as these may change during this time.

Maintenance programme

Periodontal disease is never cured, just stabilised. To achieve this, you must make sure you remove plaque thoroughly every day, and go for regular maintenance visits with your hygienist. Frequency varies according to the severity of the disease and the level of oral hygiene maintained at home. Usually this is on a 3 monthly basis. Some pockets may need to be cleaned again at recall visits, if they haven't healed. Referral to a specialist may also be needed for further root surface debridement or surgery.