Gum Disease and Your Health

What You Need to Know About

Clean and Healthy
Maintaining clean, healthy teeth and gums is as important as eating a balanced diet and regular exercise in order to prevent health problems. Good oral health means daily care at home and regular dental visits.

Daily Care for Teeth & Gums
- Brush at least twice a day
- Use toothpaste with fluoride—spit but don’t rinse
- Floss once every day
- Avoid tobacco products and limit use of alcohol
- Avoid sipping or grazing on food or drinks
- Drink water with fluoride

Regular Dental Visits
- Professional cleanings remove plaque (home of harmful germs)
- X-rays can help detect early signs of gum disease, bone loss and cavities
- Screening for gum disease
- Oral cancer screening
- Monitor progress of home care and treatment of gum disease
- Prescription rinses or fluoride to help prevent or treat disease
- Referral to a specialist for treatment of advanced gum disease

Your mouth is home to more than 400 different germs. Some of these germs are harmful and cause gum (periodontal) disease.

Gum disease is an infection in the mouth that causes tooth loss and is linked to a number of health conditions including:
- Heart disease and stroke
- Diabetes
- Preterm and low birthweight babies
- Respiratory disease
- Osteoporosis

Harmful bacteria live and multiply in the pockets formed by gum disease. These bacteria can spread and cause harm to other parts of the body.

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The Facts About Gum Disease and Your Health

You may have gum disease and not know it. Good oral hygiene and regular professional dental care are the keys to preventing gum disease. It is more important than ever to take care of your oral health—especially if you or a loved one has heart disease, diabetes, or respiratory disease, or is pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant.

How Healthy Gums Become Infected?

Gum disease is caused by plaque, a colorless film of bacteria or germs that forms on the teeth. Plaque uses sugars and starches in the diet to form acids in the mouth. The acid and bacteria irritate the gums and cause them to become red, tender, swollen and bleed easily. Without daily removal by flossing and brushing, plaque hardens around the teeth. This process causes the gums to pull away from the teeth creating pockets that become filled with harmful bacteria. If untreated, these pockets become deeper, destroying the bone that supports the teeth, resulting in tooth loss and a chronic infection that can enter the bloodstream.

Dental Care and Your Health

Until its advanced stage, gum disease is usually painless. Recent studies tell us that an estimated 75% of Americans over the age of 35 have some form of gum disease. However, when surveyed, 8 out of 10 people with gum disease did not know they had it. It’s very important to visit your dental professional for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of gum disease before it impacts health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and pregnancy outcomes.

Heart Disease

Gum disease is becoming a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. With gum disease you have nearly twice the risk of having a fatal heart attack than others. The germs that cause gum disease can also enter the bloodstream and cause an infection or inflammation in your heart’s lining, valves or arteries.

Diabetes

Diabetics are two to three times more likely to develop gum disease than others. Likewise, gum disease contributes to insulin resistance, high blood sugar and, ultimately, Type 2 diabetes. Current research also confirms that people with diabetes, who also have gum disease, may have difficulty controlling their blood sugar. Severe gum disease leads to a brain increase in blood sugar, increasing your risk for diabetic complications.

Respiratory Disease

Gum disease is becoming a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. With gum disease you have nearly twice the risk of having a fatal heart attack than others. The germs that cause gum disease can also enter the bloodstream and cause an infection or inflammation in your heart’s lining, valves or arteries.

Pregnancy

If you are planning on having a baby, see your dental professional for a teeth cleaning and gum checkup. Before you become pregnant is the best time to visit your dental office for a complete evaluation. It is important to eliminate any infection in your mouth before you become pregnant so the infection doesn’t impact the health of your baby.

Gum Disease is an Infection.

This infection can spread to other parts of your body. If you have artificial joints, are immunocompromised or are being treated for cancer or other diseases, you are at greater risk for infection and health complications. Talk with your physician and dentist before your appointment. Today, more than ever, it is important to coordinate care between your physician and your dental office.

Am I at Risk for Gum Disease?

- Gums bleed when you brush or floss your teeth
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that shrink away from your teeth
- Pus between your teeth and gums
- Pain when chewing
- Bad breath
- Teeth sensitive to hot and cold
- Parents lost teeth or had periodontal disease
- Have diabetes
- Over age 35
- Waistline greater than 35 inches (women) or 40 inches (men)
- Brush less than twice a day
- Do not floss every day
- Smoke or use tobacco
- Take medications
- Under stress
- Grind or clench teeth

If you checked any of the boxes above, please show this to your dental professional.

Sources: American Academy of Periodontology perio.org
American Diabetes Association diabetes.org
American Dental Association ada.org
American Lung Association lungusa.org