PERIODONTAL (GUM) DISEASE
CAUSES AND PREVENTION

An estimated 80% of American adults currently have some form of periodontal (gum) disease. Gum disease progresses through many levels, beginning with simple inflammation. Untreated, a more serious case can cause major damage to the soft tissue and bone that support your teeth. In the worst cases, you could lose your teeth.

In addition, gum disease may cause other health issues. Researchers are examining the possible cause-and-effect relationships between periodontal disease and

- an increased risk of heart attack or stroke;
- an increased risk of delivering preterm, low-birth-weight babies;
- difficulty controlling blood sugar levels in people with diabetes.

Any way you look at it, preventing and controlling gum disease is an important oral healthcare issue.

WHAT CAUSES PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

Our mouths are typically full of bacteria. These bacteria, along with mucus and other particles, constantly form a sticky, colorless plaque on teeth. Routine careful brushing and flossing help get rid of plaque. But plaque that is missed can harden and form bacteria-harboring tartar. Brushing can't get rid of tartar once it's formed. Only a professional cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist can remove it.

GINGIVITIS

The longer plaque and tartar stay on your teeth, the more harmful they become. The bacteria cause irritation called gingivitis. Your gums become red and swollen, and they can bleed easily. This is a mild form of gum disease that can usually be reversed with daily brushing and flossing, and regular cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist.

PERIODONTITIS

When gingivitis is not treated, it can advance to inflammation around the tooth: a condition called periodontitis. In periodontitis, the gums pull away from the teeth and form pockets that are infected. Your immune system fights the bacteria as the plaque spreads below your gum line. Bacterial toxins and the enzymes fighting the infection actually start to damage the bone and connective tissue that hold teeth in place. If not treated, the bones, gums, and connective tissue are destroyed, and consequently your teeth may become loose and have to be removed.

PREVENTION

Fortunately, there are simple steps to preventing gum disease:

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss every day.
- Visit your dentist routinely for a checkup and professional cleaning.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Don't use tobacco products.

Gum disease is preventable. You can control your risk by maintaining a lifelong oral health care routine.

NOTE: This publication is for general information only. Ask your dentist for more details.