

## What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal or gum disease is the most common cause of tooth loss in adults.

An estimated 40% of Australians are affected and one in 10 sufferers lose teeth. It is caused by the bacteria plaque, which if not removed regularly hardens to form calculus or tartar.

Plaque mixes with food to cause acids that irritate the gums.

### GINGIVITIS

At the earliest stage of the disease, gingivitis, gums are inflamed, red and puffy and may bleed during brushing or flossing.

The bones and fibres holding teeth in place have not yet been affected and with treatment gingivitis can be reversed.

### PERIODONTITIS

Over time, more calculus forms and the gums begin to recede away from the teeth, exposing the roots of the teeth below the gum line in pockets where plaque can now spread.

At the early stages of periodontitis, treatment can stop further damage and tooth loss.

If untreated, the bone structure and the ligaments holding the teeth in place are destroyed, resulting in tooth loss.

Recent research has found a link between periodontitis and heart disease. The bacteria from plaque migrates through the body causing inflammation in the arteries that may lead to heart attack and stroke.

## Causes of gum disease

Men are most at risk from the major cause of periodontal disease, bacterial plaque. Other factors that contribute include genetics, crooked teeth and lack of oral care, smoking, diabetes, some medications, stress, hormonal changes in women and illness

Causes of gum disease include:

### LOCAL FACTORS:

- Genetics - up to 20% of the population may be genetically susceptible to gum disease and despite conscientious oral care, these people may be six times more likely to develop periodontal disease.
- Crooked teeth or defective fillings - teeth that are difficult to clean means plaque and calculus are more likely to develop.
- Lack of oral hygiene and regular care - daily brushing and flossing removes plaque, the cause of gum disease.

Suite 108  
Medici Medical Centre  
15 Scott Street  
Toowoomba QLD 4350

25 Dammerel Crescent  
Emerald Beach NSW 2456

All mail to:  
PO Box 3427  
Toowoomba QLD 4350

Tel: (07) 4632 0416  
Fax: (07) 4638 9695

[www.barberperiodontics.com.au](http://www.barberperiodontics.com.au)  
[reception@barberperiodontics.com.au](mailto:reception@barberperiodontics.com.au)

- Clenching or grinding teeth - this puts excess pressure on teeth and their supporting structures, speeding up periodontal disease.

#### MODIFYING FACTORS:

- Smoking - this is the most significant risk factor in the development and progression of periodontal disease. In addition, the chemicals in tobacco can slow down the healing process and make the treatment results less predictable.
- Hormonal changes in girls/women - gums become more sensitive making them more susceptible to gum disease.
- Poor diet - sugars and starches create more acids that irritate gums
- Diabetes - this disease causes altered levels of sugar in the blood. Diabetics are at higher risk for developing infections, including periodontal disease which may be more severe than non-diabetics.
- Illness or systemic diseases - any disease that interfere with the body's immune system may worsen the condition of the gums.
- Medications - some drugs, such as oral contraceptives, anti-depressants, and certain heart medicine can impact on gum health by lessening the flow of saliva that protects teeth and gums from plaque.
- Stress - this can make it more difficult for the body to fight off infection, including periodontal diseases.

## Diagnosis

Gum disease can be diagnosed through a dental examination and oral x-rays.

During the examination, gums are checked for bleeding, swelling, and firmness. Teeth are checked for movement and sensitivity and the bite is assessed.

A tiny ruler called a 'probe' is used to gently check for and measure periodontal pockets. In a healthy mouth, the depth of these pockets is usually between one and three millimetres. Deeper pockets indicate the presence of periodontal disease requiring treatment.

X-rays assist with analysis of the disease under the gum line by detecting the breakdown of bone around teeth.

Those with a family history of periodontitis can undertake a genetic test before they show signs of the disease for preventative treatment.

## Prevention

A combination of home care and professional care by your dentist will assist in the prevention of periodontal disease:

- Brush your teeth twice each day for three minutes with a fluoride toothpaste
- Floss following brushing teeth
- Use a fluoride mouth wash daily
- Use a soft toothbrush and replace it every three months
- Visit the dentist routinely for a check-up and professional cleaning, twice each year is recommended
- Eat a well balanced diet keeping sugars that feed plaque to a minimum
- Don't smoke

## Treatment

Treatment depends on the severity of the disease once diagnosed and includes non-surgical methods of cleaning and medication. Surgical treatment methods include gum surgery, grafts and implants. Around 90% of treatment measures undertaken are non-surgical.