

Advice and information, gingivitis and periodontitis

Healthy gums

Healthy gums are light pink, slightly stippled and surround the tooth like a collar. Between the gums and the teeth there are pockets, which in a healthy mouth are 1-3 mm deep. Healthy gums do not bleed if you brush correctly.



Inflammation of the gums (gingivitis)

Inflammation of the gums, the gingivae, is caused by bacteria. If a bacterial film, known as plaque, is allowed to form and remain around the tooth, this will cause inflammation of the gums – gingivitis. The gums become red and swollen and bleed easily. The swelling causes the pockets between the teeth and the gums to become deeper, making them more difficult to keep clean. Gingivitis can be cured completely without any permanent damage. This requires good, regular oral hygiene.



Periodontitis

Untreated gingivitis can attack the attachment in the jawbone and cause the teeth to loosen. This is known as periodontitis.

If bacteria are allowed to remain in the pockets, they calcify and become tartar. The pockets become deeper and bacteria can penetrate further, destroying the tooth attachment. The tooth becomes looser and at worst could fall out.



Periodontitis can be cured with treatment but will leave permanent tissue damage, which means that any tooth attachment that is lost cannot be restored.

It is important to remember that periodontitis is a chronic disease, which means that it will return if daily oral hygiene after treatment is neglected or stops.

How do you avoid developing gingivitis and periodontitis?

Self care is most important

- Brush your teeth morning and evening and brush particularly well along the edge of your gums.
- Clean between your teeth using dental floss, an interdental brush and/or a toothpick.
- Regular visits to the dental hygienist or dentist are important to detect the disease early.

Periodontitis is detected by checking whether the pockets are bleeding (inflammation), by measuring to see whether they have become deeper and by taking x-rays.

The dental service will provide the advice and aids that are most suitable for you.

Smoking and diabetes

Smoking significantly increases the risk of developing periodontitis. Smoking causes the disease to develop more quickly and will result in poorer healing following treatment. The gums may appear to be healthy but they are actually inflamed as smoking causes the blood vessels to contract.

If you have diabetes that is difficult to control, this will slow down the healing process.

What does the treatment involve?

As part of the treatment, your dentist or dental hygienist will

- provide information about the disease
- provide advice on self care and demonstrate clearly how you can manage your oral hygiene effectively. A toothbrush and other ways of cleaning between your teeth must be used regularly. This is very important if the treatment is to be successful.
- measure the pockets and tooth movement to see how much attachment has been lost
- remove bacterial film and tartar.

In most cases the treatment will require several visits. The earlier the treatment begins the better the prognosis. The aim of the treatment is to stop the disease by curing the inflammation.

In some cases your dentist or dental hygienist may need to refer you to a periodontist, who is a specialist in periodontal diseases.