

Gum Disease

Learn the Warning Signs

EXPERT ADVICE

Puberty and Periodontal Disease

hormonal changes related to puberty can put teens at greater risk for getting periodontal disease. During puberty, an increased level of hormones, such as progesterone and possibly estrogen, cause increased blood circulation to the gums. This may cause an increase in the gum's sensitivity and lead to a greater reaction to irritations like plaque—just one more reason why teens should follow a good at-home dental hygiene regimen, including regular brushing and flossing, and regular dental care.

Source: American Academy of Periodontology

Healthy gums are firm and are pale pink. If yours are puffy and bleed easily, you might be suffering from gum disease, also called gingivitis.

WHAT IS GUM DISEASE?

Gum disease is when the gum tissue surrounding and supporting the teeth



By Judith Nembhard

becomes inflamed due to infection. The condition can begin as mild redness and tenderness, but if it continues to progress, it can cause the teeth to become loose or even fall out. The Mayo Clinic says gum disease is a "serious infection that destroys the soft tissue and bone that support your teeth."

WHAT CAUSES IT?

The culprit is plaque, the sticky layer of germs constantly forming on the teeth. If plaque remains in the mouth longer than two or three days, it can harden under your gumline into a crust called tartar, which only a dentist can remove. Plaque and tartar that remain on the teeth serve as a breeding place for more bacteria—the longer they stay on the teeth, the more harm done. Gum disease begins as gingivitis, the mildest form of periodontal disease. But if it continues to remain untreated, it can advance to full-blown peri-

odontitis, leading to loss of tissue and bone, and potentially, the loss of one or more teeth.

WHAT ARE WARNING SIGNS?

According to the Mayo Clinic, specific warning signs of periodontitis include swollen gums, bright red or purplish gums, and gums that are tender to the touch. In more advanced cases, the gums pull away from the teeth making them look longer than normal, and pus can pool in the new pockets between the teeth and gums. Loose teeth, bad breath, and changes in the way the teeth fit together are other signs of gum disease.

HOW CAN I PREVENT IT?

Gum disease is common, but dentists say it's highly preventable through proper oral hygiene. Brushing, flossing daily, and having regular professional dental cleanings can greatly reduce the possibility of developing the disease. 🦷



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