



AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?

You are likely to have periodontal disease during your lifetime. It can develop at any age. In fact, periodontal disease is one of the most prevalent diseases of man.

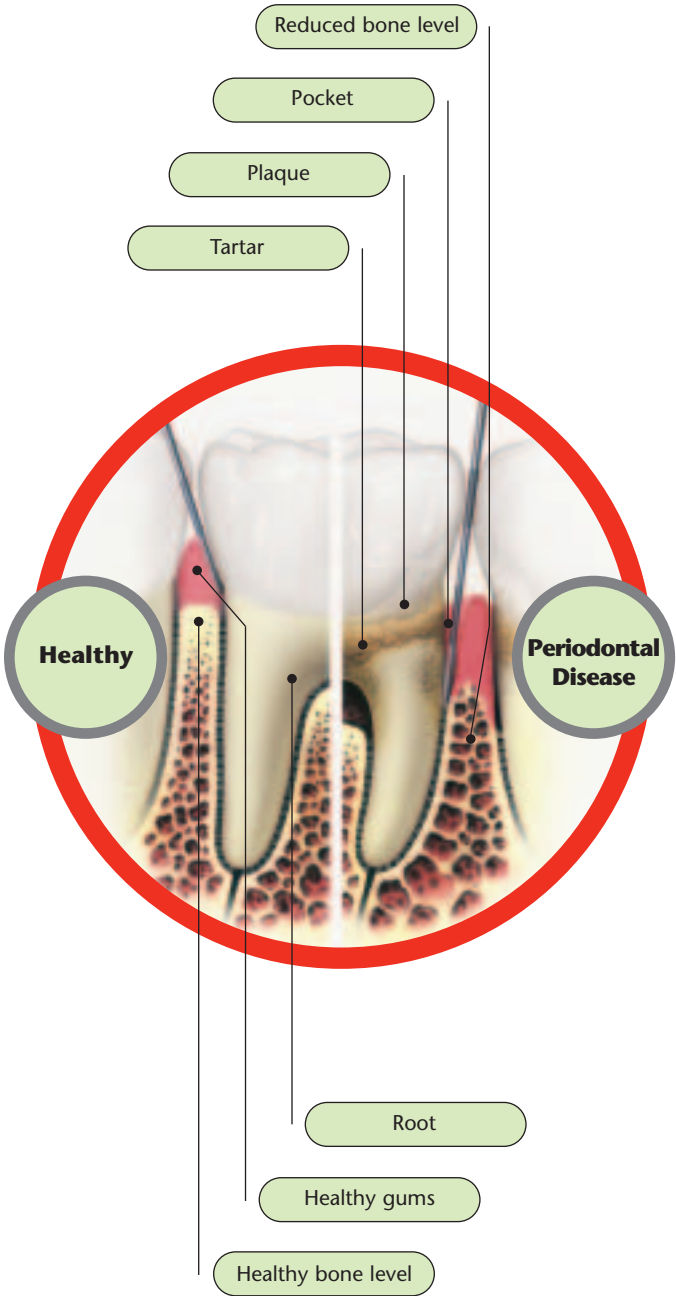


More than one in three people over age 30 have a form of periodontal disease that has advanced beyond gingivitis.* However, because periodontal disease develops silently and painlessly, the majority of people do not even realize they have it.

Knowing the state of your periodontal health is important. So, if you don't know, ask your dental professional. It's a good idea to know if you are in good periodontal health because periodontal disease and dental decay are the primary causes of adult tooth loss. But even more importantly, recent research has found a relationship between periodontal infection and more serious health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disease and preterm low birth weight babies.

As you can see, good periodontal health is a key component of a healthy body. Share this brochure with others you care about to help them learn the importance of periodontal health.

*Destructive Periodontal Disease in Adults 30 Years of Age and Older in the United States, 1988-1994, *Journal of Periodontology*, January 1999, 13-29.



What is periodontal disease?

The word “periodontal” literally means around the tooth. Periodontal disease, also known as gum disease, is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums and bone supporting the teeth. Periodontal disease can affect one tooth or many teeth. It begins when the bacteria in plaque (the sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth) causes the gums to become inflamed.

In the mildest form of the disease, gingivitis, the gums redden, swell and bleed easily. There is usually little or no discomfort. Gingivitis is often caused by inadequate oral hygiene. Gingivitis is reversible with professional treatment and good oral home care.

Untreated gingivitis can advance to periodontitis. With time, plaque can spread and grow below the gum line. Toxins produced by the bacteria in plaque irritate the gums. The toxins stimulate a chronic inflammatory response in which the body in essence turns on itself, and the tissues and bone that support the teeth are broken down and destroyed. Gums separate from the teeth, forming pockets (spaces between the teeth and gums) that become infected. As the disease progresses, the pockets deepen and more gum tissue and bone are destroyed. Often, this destructive process has very mild symptoms. Eventually, teeth can become loose and may have to be removed.

What causes periodontal disease?

Plaque is the culprit, which means that without proper at-home oral hygiene and regular dental visits, your risk clearly increases. However, even perfect oral hygiene isn't enough to ward off periodontal disease in everyone. Other risk factors that are thought to increase the risk, severity and speed of development of periodontal disease include tobacco use, general health conditions, medications, stress, genetics, hormonal changes and poor nutrition.

Who is a periodontist?

A periodontist is a dentist who specializes in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of periodontal disease and in the placement of dental implants. Periodontists receive extensive training in these areas, including three additional years of education beyond dental school. Periodontists are familiar with the latest techniques for diagnosing and treating periodontal disease. In addition, they can perform cosmetic periodontal procedures to help you achieve the smile you desire.

Often, dentists refer their patients to a periodontist when periodontal disease is present. However, you don't need a referral to see a periodontist. In fact, there are occasions when you may choose to go directly to a periodontist or to refer a family member or friend to your own periodontist.

When should I see a periodontist?

If you value your oral as well as overall health, anytime is a good time to see a periodontist for a periodontal evaluation. Sometimes the only way to detect periodontal disease is through a periodontal evaluation. A periodontal evaluation may be especially important if you:



- ❖ notice any symptoms of periodontal disease, including:
 - gums that bleed easily, such as during brushing or flossing
 - red, swollen or tender gums
 - gums that have pulled away from the teeth
 - persistent bad breath
 - pus between the teeth and gums
 - loose or separating teeth
 - a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite

- ❖ are thinking of becoming pregnant. Pregnant women who have periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a baby born too early and too small.*

*Potential Pathogenic Mechanisms of Periodontitis-Associated Pregnancy Complications, *Annals of Periodontology*, Volume 3, Number 1, July 1998, 233-250.

In addition, about half of women experience “pregnancy gingivitis.” However, women who have good oral hygiene and have no gingivitis before pregnancy are very unlikely to experience this condition.

- ❖ have a family member with periodontal disease. Research suggests that the bacteria that cause periodontal disease can pass through saliva. This means the common contact of saliva in families puts children and couples at risk for contracting the periodontal disease of another family member.
- ❖ have heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease or osteoporosis. Ongoing research is showing that periodontal disease may be linked to these conditions. The bacteria associated with periodontal disease can travel into the blood stream and pose a threat to other parts of the body. Healthy gums may lead to a healthier body.
- ❖ feel that your teeth are too short or that your smile is too “gummy.” Or, if you are missing one or more of your teeth and are interested in a long-lasting replacement option.



- ❖ are not satisfied with your current tooth replacement option, such as a bridge or dentures, and may be interested in dental implants.
- ❖ have a sore or irritation in your mouth that does not get better within two weeks.

What can I expect the first time I visit a periodontist?

During your first visit, your periodontist will review your complete medical and dental history with you. It's extremely important for your periodontist to know if you are taking any medications or are being treated for any condition that can affect your periodontal care.



Your periodontist will examine your gums, check to see if there is any gum line recession, assess how your teeth fit together when you bite and check your teeth to see if any are loose. Your periodontist also will take a small measuring instrument and place it between your teeth and gums to determine the depth of those spaces, known as periodontal pockets. This helps your periodontist assess the health of your gums. X-rays may be taken to observe the health of the bone below your gums.

How can periodontal disease be prevented?

The best way to prevent periodontal disease is through effective daily brushing and flossing, as well as regular dental visits that include a periodontal exam and thorough cleaning. If plaque is not removed, it can turn into a hard substance called calculus in less than two days.

Calculus, or tartar as this substance is often called, is so hard, it can only be removed during a professional cleaning.

Daily cleaning will help keep calculus formation to a minimum, but it won't completely prevent it. A professional cleaning at least twice a year is necessary to remove calculus from places your toothbrush and floss may have missed.

Former Surgeon General

C. Everett Koop

once said,

**“A person is not healthy
without good oral health.”**

Seeing a periodontist can help
you keep your teeth
for a lifetime,
restore confidence in your
smile and positively impact
overall health.

So

**S P R E A D
T H E**

W O R D

periodontal care is
for everyone!



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WHO

If you're 55 or older...

your chances of developing periodontal disease increase considerably.

More than half of people aged 55 and older have periodontitis.* The good news is that research suggests that these higher rates may be related to risk factors other than age. So, periodontal disease is not an inevitable part of aging. Risk factors that may make older people more susceptible include general health status, diminished immune status, medications, depression, worsening memory, diminished salivary flow, functional impairments and change in financial status.



To help protect your oral health, keep these things in mind:

- ❖ Reduced saliva flow is a common problem among older adults. Hundreds of medications (such as high blood pressure drugs, diuretics, decongestants and antidepressants), as well as medical disorders, can cause dry mouth. Dry mouth can make you more susceptible to tooth decay and periodontal disease. Be sure to tell your periodontist about any medications that you are taking, including herbal remedies and over-the-counter medications. Your dental professional can recommend various methods to restore moisture, including sugarless gum, oral rinses or artificial saliva products.

*Destructive Periodontal Disease in Adults 30 Years of Age and Older in the United States, 1988-1994, *Journal of Periodontology*, January 1999, 13-29.

- ❖ Many older adults have receding gums. Receding gums leave the roots of the teeth exposed, making tooth roots vulnerable to decay and periodontal disease. To keep your teeth for a lifetime, periodontists recommend removing the plaque from your teeth and gums every day with proper brushing and flossing. At least twice a year, a professional cleaning is necessary to remove calculus from places your toothbrush and floss may have missed. Your periodontist may recommend treatment options to cover exposed roots and prevent further periodontal problems.
- ❖ Medical conditions associated with aging, such as diabetes and osteoporosis, may increase your risk of periodontal disease. In addition, memory problems may lead to lessened oral hygiene. And, arthritis can make brushing and flossing more difficult. Talk to your periodontist about your health history. Your periodontist can make recommendations specific to your condition.
- ❖ Women who are menopausal or postmenopausal may experience discomfort in the mouth, including pain and burning sensations in the gum tissue, altered taste, receding gums and dry mouth. These changes, attributed to hormonal reduction, can leave you more susceptible to periodontal disease. Estrogen supplements may help to relieve these symptoms. Talk to your periodontist about any oral changes you may have noticed.

As you age, remember that it's more important than ever to seek regular dental care. With good preventative home care and regular professional cleanings and periodontal evaluations, you can keep your teeth for a lifetime.

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