apollo
dental health clinic ltd

Gum Disease

(Gingivitis & Periodontitis)

Information for Patients

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What is Gum Disease (Gingivitis/Periodontitis)

Gingivitis is the inflammation of the superficial tissues of the gums around the necks of the teeth. Periodontitis is an inflammatory disease which affects the deeper structures of the gums and bone surrounding the roots of the teeth. It is a more serious condition that can lead to the loss of teeth. Gingivitis is reversible, the damage caused by Periodontitis is irreversible.

How do I know if I have Gum Disease?

Gingivitis is rarely painful. Usually, bleeding gums when cleaning will be the only sign that a patient will be aware of. With Periodontitis, the patient may be aware of loosening of the teeth. However, most patients will be unaware that they have gum disease.

As part of your routine care, your dentist will continually monitor your gums and will advise you of any problems with your gum health.

What causes gum disease?

Gingivitis is caused by failing to remove the sticky bacterial plaque accumulations on teeth due to poor oral hygiene habits and/or techniques. Gingivitis may, if left untreated, progress to Periodontitis.

There are several risk factors for Gum Disease, including:

- **Smoking**
- **Diabetes**
- **Family History**
- **Some medications**
- **Stress**

Smoking is by far the greatest risk factor for gum disease and, statistically, smokers will loose teeth at a earlier age than non-smokers. Smoking hinders the natural healing capabilities of the gums.

Diabetes hinders the body's ability to respond to infection, so diabetics are more susceptible to gum disease, especially if the diabetes is poorly controlled. Recent research has also suggested that people with long-standing gum disease are more likely to become diabetic - in other words, gum disease is a risk factor for Diabetes.
It is worth noting that for every patient in the UK that knows they have Diabetes, there is another person that has Diabetes but has not been diagnosed, and their condition is likely to be poorly controlled.

Family History - it is known that the susceptibility to gum disease can run in families, especially through the female line. It is important that if gum disease is diagnosed in a female patient, any daughters of that patient are monitored closely from a young age.

Medications - common medication used in the control of blood pressure (calcium channel blockers such as Amlodipine, Felodipine, Nifedipine) and some anti-epileptic drugs (Epanutin/Phenytoin) have side effects on the gums whereby they cause swelling or overgrowth of the gum tissue making plaque removal more difficult.

Stress reduces the efficiency of our immune system's response to disease. Gum disease may be more persistent or severe in patients who have longterm stress.

Your dentist will take a medical history for you at every check-up and it is important that you tell him/her everything relating to your health, no matter how trivial it may seem, as it may reveal risk factors for gum disease.

How can gum disease lead to me loosing my teeth?

If left untreated, Periodontitis will lead to the destruction of the anchoring tissues which attach the root of the tooth to its boney socket. This will lead to 'pockets' forming which will harbour bacteria. Deeper pockets will be difficult for you, the patient, to clean effectively leading to persistence of the bacteria and disease. Eventually the bone around the roots of the affected teeth will be destroyed, resulting in the gradual loosening and eventual loss of the teeth. There is rarely any pain in this disease process, and often a patient will only become aware of the problem once the teeth are noticeably loose. Loosening occurs when the disease is in its advances stages, and the prognosis for the affected teeth may be poor.

How will my Dentist treat my Gum Disease?

Improvement in gum health is achieved by meticulous plaque control by you, the patient. It is this daily thorough removal of the plaque by you that allows the gum health to improve.

Scaling of the teeth by your Dentist or Hygienist helps to treat the disease; it removes the hard deposits (calculus), which make it easier for you to perform your plaque control thoroughly. Some of your Dentist/Hygienist appointments may involve no scaling, but instead will involve detailed investigations on the severity of your disease, discussion on its causes and risk factors, and intensive oral hygiene instruction.

We will instruct you on exactly what you need to do at home to effectively remove plaque from your teeth. We will then expect you to carry out our instructions so that your gum health improves. Only when your gum health improves through daily plaque control, can your Dentist/Hygienist carry out additional work on your gums to improve them further. If you do not carry out the procedures we prescribe for you to do at home, then any treatment the Dentist/Hygienist provides for your gums will fail, disease will progress, and teeth may be lost.
If the gums do not respond well to treatment, despite our best efforts, we will recommend a referral to a local Periodontal Specialist.

Why is important to treat gum disease?

Gum disease is the biggest cause of tooth loss in adults. It is important to maintain healthy gums if you want to keep your natural teeth for the duration of your life.

Apart from the risk of loosing teeth, untreated Gum Disease can have significant effects on your general health. This is because the chronic inflammation associated with the disease can affect other organs of the body. The condition has been linked to increased risks of:

- heart disease and stroke
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Premature, low birth-weight babies

So, for the sake of your teeth and general health, make sure that you maintain healthy gums by brushing thoroughly twice a day, flossing daily, and visiting your dentist regularly for monitoring and advice.

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