



## What is periodontal disease?

### (also called gum disease)

Periodontal (perry-o-DON-tal) disease is an inflammation of the gums that can lead to loss of the bone that supports the teeth. If it is not treated, the disease can cause tooth loss. This disease is common and affects people of all ages.

You can have periodontal disease without pain or other clear symptoms. That's why it is important to visit the dentist regularly. Regular dental visits allow your dentist to spot and treat problems in their early stages.

## ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth once a day.
- Eat a balanced diet and limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org), the ADA's website just for patients.



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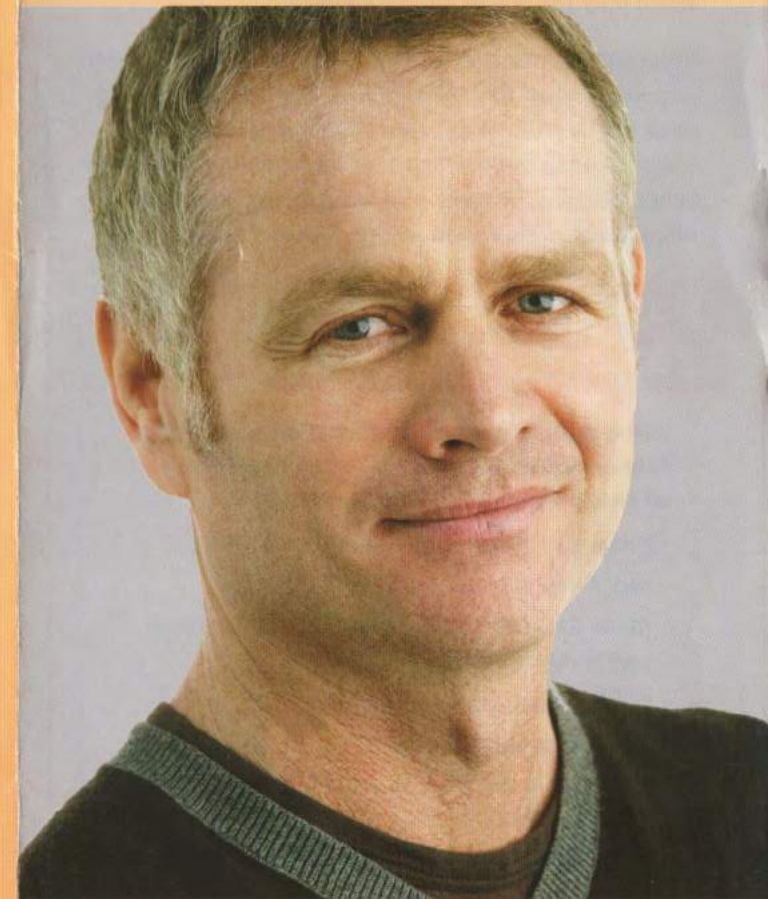
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# Periodontal Disease

KEEP YOUR GUMS HEALTHY



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## What causes periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is caused by plaque, a sticky film that is always forming on your teeth. Plaque contains bacteria that produce harmful toxins. If teeth are not cleaned well, the toxins can irritate and inflame the gums.

Healthy gum tissue fits like a cuff around each tooth. But inflamed gum tissue can pull away from the teeth and form spaces called pockets. These pockets collect more plaque bacteria. If the infected pockets are not treated, the disease gets worse. The bone and other tissues that support teeth are damaged. Over time, teeth may fall out or need to be removed.

You can help prevent tooth loss by cleaning your teeth and gums each day. Plaque is removed by brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing daily. If plaque stays on your teeth, it hardens into a rough substance called calculus, or tartar. Tartar can only be removed when teeth are cleaned at the dental office.

## How can I tell if I have periodontal disease?

Some people with periodontal disease have few or no warning signs. If you notice any of these signs, see your dentist:

- gums that bleed when you brush or floss
- red, swollen or tender gums
- gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- bad breath that doesn't go away
- pus between your teeth and gums
- loose or separating teeth
- a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- a change in the fit of partial dentures



Normal, healthy gums

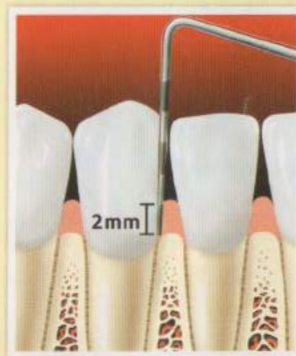


Periodontal disease

## How does my dentist check for periodontal disease?

The dentist checks for problems by looking at the color and firmness of your gums. He or she also uses a tool called a periodontal probe to gently measure the depth of pockets between your teeth and gums. Very deep pockets are a sign of advanced periodontal disease.

During your visit, dental x-rays may be taken to check the amount of bone supporting the teeth. The dentist may also check how your teeth fit together.



Periodontal probe of healthy gums.



Periodontal probe showing space forming between the tooth root and the gums. Dentists call this a pocket.

## How do I keep my gums healthy?

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste for at least two minutes each time.
- Clean between your teeth daily with floss or another interdental cleaner.
- If you need extra help controlling plaque, your dentist or hygienist may recommend using a germ-fighting toothpaste, mouthrinse or other oral hygiene aids.
- Eat a healthy diet for good general and oral health.
- Don't use tobacco in any form.
- Visit your dentist regularly for an exam and professional cleaning. With regular dental visits, your dentist can detect and treat periodontal disease in its early stages.

## Are there treatments for periodontal disease?

The mildest form of periodontal disease is called **gingivitis** (jin-ji-VIE-tis). It makes the gums red and swollen. They also may bleed easily when you brush. The good news is that gingivitis can be reversed. Sometimes all it takes is better oral care at home and more frequent professional cleanings.

The more advanced form of the disease is called **periodontitis** (perry-o-don-TIE-tis). It results in more swelling and redness in the tissues around the teeth. It also causes the tissue and bone to break down.

If you have periodontitis, your dentist may suggest a treatment called **scaling and root planing**. The dentist carefully removes plaque and tartar down to the bottom of each periodontal pocket. He or she also smooths the tooth's root surfaces to allow the gum tissue to heal and reattach to the tooth. This treatment often takes more than one visit.

To control infection, sometimes antibiotics can be placed directly in the pocket after scaling and root planing. Your dentist may also prescribe medicines to help control pain or aid healing.

All dentists are taught to detect and treat periodontal disease. Sometimes your dentist may refer you to a periodontist. This is a dentist who specializes in diagnosing and treating periodontal disease.

**SEE YOUR  
DENTIST  
REGULARLY**

**Periodontal disease will not go away by itself.** Preventing and treating the disease in the early stages are the best ways to keep your smile healthy and avoid tooth loss. If you have periodontal disease, follow your dentist's recommendations for treatment and follow-up care.