GUM DISEASE

Gum disease, also known as periodontal disease, is one of the most common dental problems adults face, yet it can begin at any age. It is often painless and happens slowly. Sometimes you may not notice any signs until the disease is serious and you are in danger of losing your teeth.

The good news is that gum disease can be prevented with good oral hygiene and regular visits to your dentist. Gum disease can be treated and even turned around in its early stages. There are 2 types of gum disease: gingivitis and periodontitis.

GINGIVITIS

Gingivitis is a term used to describe inflammation of the gums that usually precedes periodontitis if left untreated.

PERIODONTITIS

Periodontitis is one of the main reasons why adults lose their teeth. It is an inflammation of the bone and soft tissue around your teeth. Without enough bone and soft tissue to hold your teeth in place, your teeth can become loose and fall out. In its early stages, periodontitis is very hard to see. You may not know that you have a problem until you visit your dentist. The warning signs of periodontitis may include:

- A change in the colour of your gums
- Red gums
- Gums that bleed when you brush or floss
- Bad breath that will not go away
- Shiny, puffy or sore gums
- Sensitive teeth
- Loose tooth or teeth increasing space between your teeth
- Receding gum line (gums separating from your teeth and exposing the root)

PROGRESSION OF GUM DISEASE

Gum disease affects the attachment between gums and teeth. Here's how:

1. Gum disease begins with plaque that forms where your teeth and gums meet. Plaque is an invisible sticky film that contains bacteria and forms on your teeth every day. If plaque is not removed every day by brushing and flossing, it hardens into tartar. Tartar can only be removed with a professional cleaning. If tartar is not removed, it builds up around your teeth and under your gum lines, making it impossible to properly clean your teeth of plaque.

2. If plaque is not removed, the bacteria within the plaque produce and release toxins that cause your gums to become inflamed. The inflammation breaks down the attachment of your gums to your teeth, leaving pockets.

3. If gum disease is not treated, bacteria continue to grow in these pockets and their toxins make the inflammation worse. Eventually, the inflammation breaks down the gum and bone tissue supporting your teeth.

4. In advanced gum disease, the pockets extend and the bacteria move deeper until the bone that holds your teeth in place is destroyed. Your teeth may eventually become loose and fall out, or may need to be removed.
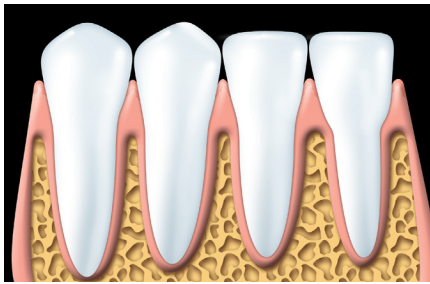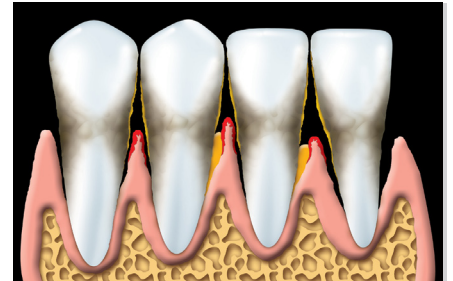
Healthy gums: Teeth are held firmly in place by gums and bone.
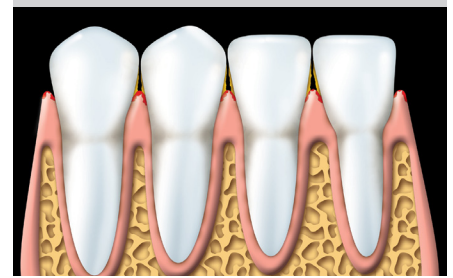
Gingivitis: Gums are inflamed and irritated by plaque.
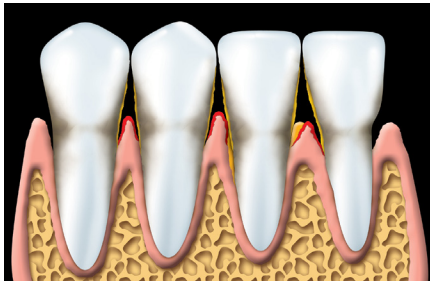
Periodontitis: Tiny pockets form between the gums and teeth. Gum and bone tissue start to break down.

Advanced periodontitis: Gum and bone tissue continue to deteriorate. Teeth may be loose.
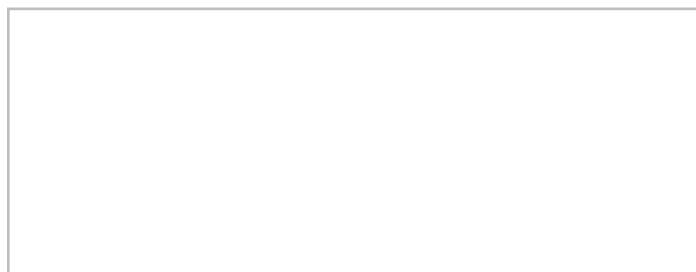
PREVENTING GUM DISEASE

To help prevent periodontal disease, follow these steps to good oral health:

1. See your dentist regularly.

2. Practise good oral hygiene.

3. Eat a well-balanced diet. Check your mouth regularly.

4. Don't smoke or chew tobacco.

TREATING GUM DISEASE

Depending on the stage of the disease, your dentist will determine if your treatment will require one or a combination of scaling and root planning, antibiotics or surgery.

Scaling and root planing involves your dentist or specialist scraping away (scaling) the plaque and tartar from above and below the gum line and smoothing away any rough spots (planing) on the root of the tooth. This treatment removes bacteria and provides a clean surface for the gums to heal and reattach to the teeth.

Antibiotics are used to remove most of the bacteria linked with gum disease and can be used alone or in combination with surgery and other treatments.

Surgery is needed if the tissue around your teeth is still unhealthy after scaling and root planing with or without medication. Most surgical treatments can be done in the dental office.

The following are the most common treatments for gum disease:

• **Pocket reduction surgery** involves lifting back the gums and removing the tartar. In some cases, diseased tissue is removed and the bone tissue is smoothed. The gums are then sewn back into place.

• **Bone and soft tissue grafts** restore damaged gums and strengthen damaged bones by replacing the gums and building up the bone with soft and hard tissue.

• **Tissue regeneration** involves inserting a small piece of mesh between your bone and gum tissue. This stops the gum tissue from growing where it shouldn't and allows the bone tissue to strengthen.