



Oral Health  
Foundation

Better oral health for all

The Oral Health Foundation is an independent charity dedicated to promoting good oral health.

The Foundation promotes three key messages:

- 1 Brush your teeth last thing at night and at least one other time during the day, with a fluoride toothpaste.
- 2 Cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- 3 Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

The Dental Helpline is a confidential and independent advice service. Call from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, or you can email from our website at any time.

 Dental  
Helpline  
01788 539780  
[www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)

Oral Health Foundation  
Smile House, 2 East Union Street, Rugby CV22 6AJ  
Registered Charity Number 263198

© Oral Health Foundation  
Printed 03/17

plain English  
approved  
by the word centre

Tell me about



# Gum disease





## Q What is gum disease?

**A** Gum disease is described as swelling, soreness or infection of the tissues supporting the teeth. There are two main forms of gum disease: gingivitis and periodontal disease.

## Q What is gingivitis?

**A** Gingivitis means 'inflammation of the gums'. This is when the gums around the teeth become very red and swollen. Often the swollen gums bleed when they are brushed during cleaning.

## Q What is periodontal disease?

**A** Long-standing gingivitis can turn into periodontal disease. There are a number of types of periodontal disease and they all affect the tissues supporting the teeth. As the disease gets worse the bone anchoring the teeth in the jaw is lost, making the teeth loose. If this is not treated, the teeth may eventually fall out.

## Q Am I likely to suffer from gum disease?

**A** Probably. Most people suffer from some form of gum disease, and it is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. However, the disease develops very slowly in most people, and it can be slowed down to a rate that should allow you to keep most of your teeth for life.

## Q What is the cause of gum disease?

**A** All gum disease is caused by plaque. Plaque is a film of bacteria which forms on the surface of the teeth every day. Many of the bacteria in plaque are completely harmless, but there are some that have been shown to be the main cause of gum disease. To prevent and treat gum disease, you need to make sure you remove all the plaque from your teeth every day. This is done by brushing and cleaning in between the teeth with 'interdental' brushes or floss. See our leaflet 'Tell me about Caring for my teeth and gums' for how to do this.

## Q How will smoking affect my gums and teeth?

**A** Smoking can also make gum disease worse. People who smoke are more likely to produce bacterial plaque, which leads to gum disease. The gums are affected because smoking causes a lack of oxygen in the bloodstream, so the infected gums don't heal. Smoking causes people to have more plaque and the gum disease to get worse more quickly than in non-smokers. Gum disease is still a major cause of tooth loss in adults.

## Q What happens if gum disease is not treated?

**A** Unfortunately, gum disease does not usually cause pain as it gets worse so you do not notice the damage it is doing. However, the bacteria are sometimes more active and this makes your gums sore. This can lead to gum abscesses, and pus may ooze from around the teeth. Over a number of years, the bone supporting the teeth can be lost. If the disease is left untreated for a long time, treatment can be more difficult.

## Q How do I know if I have gum disease?

**A** The first sign is blood on your toothbrush or in the toothpaste you spit out after cleaning your teeth. Your gums may also bleed when you are eating, leaving a bad taste in your mouth. Your breath may also become unpleasant.

## Q What do I do if I think I have gum disease?

**A** The first thing to do is visit your dental team for a thorough check-up of your teeth and gums. They will measure the 'cuff' of gum around each tooth to see if there is any sign that periodontal disease has started. X-rays may also be needed to see the amount of bone that has been lost. This assessment is very important, so the correct treatment can be prescribed for you.



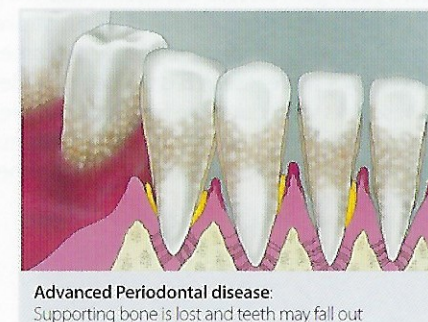
Healthy gums



Gingivitis: Tender swollen gums bleed easily



Periodontal disease



Advanced Periodontal disease: Supporting bone is lost and teeth may fall out