

# Periodontal (gum) disease

Caring for your teeth  
February 2022

Healthy gums are just as important as healthy teeth. Gums support teeth in their positions in the mouth and protect the roots (bottom) of your teeth. If you have periodontal disease, it's important to get on to it early. Read on for everything you need to know about periodontal disease and how to manage it.

## What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is a condition where the supporting structures of the tooth including the gums and bone become inflamed and permanently damaged if left untreated. The main cause is plaque, a build-up of bacteria around your teeth. Plaque can often mineralise to become calculus or tartar.

In the more advanced stages, gum and bone may be permanently damaged and if not treated, eventually lead to tooth loss. Periodontal disease can be associated with other health conditions such as heart conditions, so it is important to get your gums checked regularly.

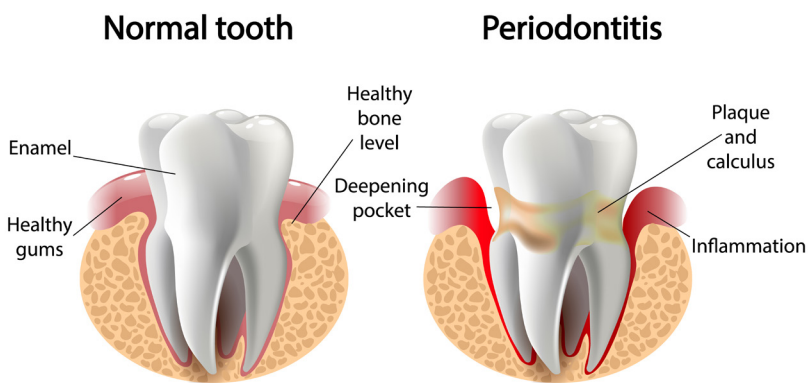
Periodontal disease during the early stages is curable. It can be treated by cleaning off plaque and calculus and improving home care by brushing and flossing.

## What should I watch out for?

The most common symptoms of gum disease are bleeding, swollen red gums. You may also notice bad breath or taste, loosening or movement of teeth, pain and shrinkage of gums. If you notice any of these, please see your dental practitioner.

## What can I expect when my gums are checked?

Checking the gums is a vital part of your dental check-up which is why your dental practitioner will be using a thin, blunt instrument called a periodontal probe to measure your gums in some areas. These measurements help to identify if there are any deep pockets. Deep pockets are formed by a buildup of calculus and plaque in the space between the tooth and gums leading to inflammation, swelling and eventually even bone loss. X-rays may be needed to assess the amount of bone loss.



Recording the measurements of the pockets on all your teeth (periodontal charting) would be the next step to identifying the extent of your periodontal disease if deep pocket depths are found. You may feel some tenderness or pressure when the gums are being measured, however it is often relatively painless!



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References available on request.  
Contact [ask@adavb.org](mailto:ask@adavb.org)



## What to expect during periodontal treatment – Are there any side effects?

Periodontal treatment options include deep cleaning and root planing. Root planing is a procedure to remove infected deposits on the root surface which leaves behind a smooth surface. Deep cleaning and root planing are performed under local anaesthesia so that you will be numb throughout the entire procedure. Your dental practitioner will remove calculus and bacteria from the pockets using ultrasonic scalers (similarly to regular teeth cleaning) and hand instruments. This helps to promote a clean surface for gums to reattach to your teeth. In more advanced stages of periodontal disease, your dentist may refer you to see a periodontist (a gum specialist) who may do further gum treatment, including gum surgery or bone grafting if necessary.

Your dentist will also show you techniques to improve your oral hygiene at home, including brushing and cleaning between your teeth with floss or small “interdental” brushes.



After your periodontal treatment, you can expect some bleeding, tenderness, discomfort and/or teeth sensitivity that should resolve after a few days or weeks depending on the severity of your periodontal disease. You may occasionally notice your gums pulling away from your teeth or shrinking back after root planing. Using salt water rinses and toothpaste for sensitive teeth with a soft toothbrush will help improve the tenderness and sensitivity. Pain killers can also help if recommended by your dental practitioner. Be careful not to have anything hot right after your procedure, as you will be numb and can burn your lip or tongue!

## Home care and regular dental visits are important

Periodontal disease requires regular dental visits to ensure that it remains stable. Following the initial deep cleaning and root planing treatment, three to six monthly reviews are essential to ensure that your periodontal disease is being monitored and is not getting worse. At these review visits, your dental practitioner will conduct periodontal charts to assess your condition and professionally clean your teeth. Professional teeth cleaning is important to prevent periodontal disease from recurring. Bear in mind that periodontal treatment will not be effective if you do not take care of your gums and teeth on a daily basis! Your dental practitioner will go through ways to clean your teeth to promote healthy gums using brushes, floss (for small gaps between teeth) and interdental brushes (for large gaps).



Further information is available at [teeth.org.au/gum-disease-treatment](https://teeth.org.au/gum-disease-treatment)



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