

What is periodontitis?

Periodontitis is a type of gum disease. It is an inflammatory disease affecting the tooth supporting tissues (gums, bone and periodontal ligament – the tissue that connects the tooth to the bone). The disease causes destruction of the bone resulting in loose teeth, drifted teeth (spacing), recession and the appearance of long teeth, and teeth may even fall out.

In adults the main reason for tooth extraction is periodontitis.

Periodontitis can be classified as chronic or aggressive. Chronic periodontitis is very common and occurs in 80% of the population. Aggressive periodontitis is rare occurring in only 0.001% of the population.

What is Chronic Periodontitis?

Chronic periodontitis is primarily caused by bacterial plaque.

Dental Plaque

Dental plaque is the white material that forms on the teeth . It contains vast numbers of bacteria in a sticky matrix.

If plaque is not removed from the teeth it irritates the gums and causes gingivitis (inflammation of the gum tissue). The gums appear red and swollen and bleed when brushed/probed.

If gingivitis is left untreated – ie the plaque is not removed, periodontitis can develop. Initially periodontal “pockets” are formed where the bacteria destroy the periodontal ligament - the attachment of the gum to the tooth, and the gum comes away from the tooth. The disease then destroys the bone which supports the teeth.

About 90% of the population are susceptible to gingivitis progressing to periodontitis. About 10% of the population are highly susceptible to severe advanced periodontal disease.

Periodontitis is not curable but in most cases can be controlled.

What is Aggressive Periodontitis?

This disease is less related to bacterial plaque than chronic periodontitis. Rapid breakdown of tooth supporting bone can occur and teeth become mobile and may fall out. Referral to see a specialist in periodontal disease may be advised.

Periodontitis affects general health

Periodontitis is linked to diabetes, atherosclerosis and heart disease, and reduced life expectancy. Periodontitis in pregnant women is linked to preterm labour and low birth weight babies.

Diagnosing Periodontitis

Periodontitis is painless so often people are unaware that they have it.

When you visit the dentist for a check-up, the dentist carries out an examination of your gums. Using a specialised instrument, which is like a small ruler they check for gum disease – gingivitis and periodontitis.



Why do I suffer?

The most important factor in the development of periodontitis is inadequate removal of dental plaque. The most important factor in controlling periodontitis is effective daily oral hygiene.

However some people are more susceptible to advanced periodontitis because of their genetic make-up: If you have a family history of gum disease/early tooth loss please tell your dentist.

Periodontitis appears to be worse in people who are stressed.

Periodontitis is more common in smokers, it also progresses faster and people who smoke respond less well to treatment.

An unhealthy diet is linked to Periodontitis. A diet high in refined carbohydrate and saturated fat puts a strain on the body leading to the body coping less well with inflammation, resulting in worsening of diseases such as diabetes and Periodontitis. A diet high in vitamin C and other antioxidants appears to help prevent periodontitis.

Lots of medications have oral side effects, some can cause swelling of the gums such as some antihypertensive drugs, others disturb saliva which in a healthy patient protects the teeth and gums.

Some patients have unusual tooth anatomy such as short roots which can makes the effects of periodontal bone loss more apparent.

Risk factors for periodontitis	Your risk factors
Poor plaque control (ineffective cleaning, frequent sugar intake)	
Hard deposits on teeth	
Smoking	
Unhealthy diet (high in saturated fat/refined carbohydrates)	
Family history of gum disease	
Previous experience of gum disease	
Diabetes	
Stress	
Other Illnesses (cancer, HIV)	
Medications	
Tooth anatomy	

What is periodontitis and why do I suffer?



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