

What is “Periodontal Disease?”



Periodontal (perio or gum) disease is a bacterial infection that occurs under the gums and causes, bleeding, pain, halitosis (bad breath) and bone loss from the jaws. It is caused by a build up of calculus, bacteria and food that collects in “pockets” under the gum line that are difficult to reach with a toothbrush or floss. Perio disease can also occur if correct brushing and flossing techniques are not used, or oral hygiene is not maintained. Also, some medical conditions and medications change the acidity levels of your saliva and in turn allow the bacteria to be produced more readily. These include:

- Diabetes
- Cholesterol medications
- Anti-depressant medications
- Hormones present during pregnancy and menopause

Some of the symptoms you can expect to notice with perio disease include:

- Bleeding when you brush or floss
- Halitosis or bad breath
- Pain – either mild or intermittent sharp or aching pain
- Tooth instability – your teeth should not “wobble” unless you are 6 years old.

Your dentist will be able to diagnose perio disease through examination, pocket probing, digital radiographs, and i-CAT scans. Once diagnosed, a clinical perio analysis is done. This involves an examination of the pocket depths at each tooth. Pockets of more than 4mm need to be treated with periodontal therapy. If your dentist diagnoses you with periodontal disease, take it seriously. It is a condition that needs treatment – urgently.

Why is perio disease so bad?

Perio disease or gum disease causes bone loss to occur in the jaw. The bacteria gradually eats away at the bone. This means that the bone that holds your teeth in place is reduced. Teeth can begin to move and become “wobbly”. The end result of perio disease is the loss of your teeth.

Recent studies have also indicated that perio disease can have an adverse effect on your general health. Perio disease has been linked to conditions such as heart disease, premature birth and adult onset diabetes. We may refer you to a medical practitioner for further diagnosis of these conditions.

How is perio disease treated?

Periodontal treatment involves several stages.

- Clinical perio analysis to determine the level and extent of the disease.
- A course of perio treatment which uses very fine dental instruments to curette the pockets and remove the infection. This may involve one or many treatments. This procedure is done using local anesthetic so you will feel no discomfort.
- Ongoing monitoring and intermittent treatment as required.

In most cases your hygienist will manage your treatment in conjunction with your dentist. Hygienists are specially trained in the management of gum disease and will monitor your progress during your treatment. The treatment consists of ultrasonic scaling (a device utilized for the removal of calculus, stain, and bacterial toxins on teeth utilizing the principle of high frequency vibration), hand scaling, root planning (smoothes roots) and curettage (removes diseased tissue), and irrigation with antibiotics. In some cases we can use a laser to assist in removing the bacteria. Depending on the severity of disease, we may recommend oral antibiotics, fluoride treatment, and antibacterial rinses. Also, a home-care regimen of tooth brushing and flossing is instructed in conjunction with other home-care devices (specific electric toothbrushes) which may be required for continued health of your tissues.

We want your Periodontal treatment to be a pleasant, comfortable and healthy experience. For your comfort, topical anesthetic and local anesthetic are routinely used. As always, nitrous oxide, oral valium and DVDs are available for your relaxation.

After the course of treatment, your hygienist will see you for a periodontal maintenance visit to evaluate the success of your perio treatment. Pocket depths and bleeding points will be re-measured, checked, and treated as needed.

It takes six months to one year before new gum attachment fibers become mature and more resistant to bacterial re-infection, therefore the dentist and hygienist recommends a three month recall/continuing care interval so that your level of periodontal health can be monitored and maintained. As your mouth continues healing, the interval between hygiene appointments will be evaluated according to your individual progress and the rate of calculus formation.

The “pockets” may re-attached to the bone to a degree. In many cases the pockets remain and will act as a site for continual re-infection. In some cases, the only way to remove the pockets is to surgically “cut them off”. This poses risks in itself, because it often exposes the roots of the tooth to further decay and damage.

Your personal home care is the determining factor in the continued success of your treatment. We will do our best to assist you in anyway necessary to have healthy tissues surrounding your tooth for a lifetime.

What to expect after your perio treatment

- Your gums may take several days to settle and not feel tender. Keep in mind that they haven't seen the light of day for quite a while.
- You must adhere strictly to the instructions given to you in regard to correct brushing/flossing technique/rinses/gels
- You must attend your review as arranged
- Take care when your mouth is still numb after local anesthetic. Avoid hot drinks, smoking and alcohol for several hours.

Your teeth may be sensitive to cold especially after root planning. This is because the root surface of the tooth has been uncovered and needs to re-mineralize with Fluoride or tooth mousse. Make sure they have taken this home and use it as directed.

Perio or gum disease is serious and should be managed immediately. If you have any concerns about the health of your gums, please discuss them with your dentist. If perio disease is treated early, you may save your teeth. If you leave it for too long, you might just be looking at your new teeth in a glass by your bedside table.

Remember, healthy gums should never bleed!