



## Periodontal Disease

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# Periodontal Disease

**P**eriodontal disease (unhealthy gums and teeth) often reflects serious health risks. Mild inflammation of the gums (**gingivitis**) can be prevented by regularly brushing and flossing teeth to remove **plaque** (buildup of a film on the teeth). This stops the development of **tartar** (hardened accumulation of plaque at the gum line), which can only be removed by dental cleaning. More serious infection, called **periodontitis**, can cause not only disease of the gums, but loss of teeth and the bone structures that support the teeth. Periodontitis may be associated with heart disease, stroke, and **systemic** (whole body) infections. There is also evidence that premature births happen more often to women who have gum disease before or during their pregnancies. The February 6, 2008, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about an association between periodontal disease and smoking marijuana.

## CAUSES

- Poor dental hygiene—not brushing your teeth or using dental floss regularly—allows the buildup of plaque and tartar, making the gum tissue unhealthy.
- Smoking causes decreased oxygen delivery to the gum tissue and makes it easier for bacteria to invade the gums.
- Some medications may cause **gingival hyperplasia** (overgrowth of gum tissue) or receding gums.
- Viral or fungal infection
- Poor nutrition, especially vitamin and mineral deficiencies, may cause gum disease or loss of teeth.
- Chronic medical conditions, including diabetes, may lead to greater risk of infections or poor healing in the gums as well as in other body tissues.

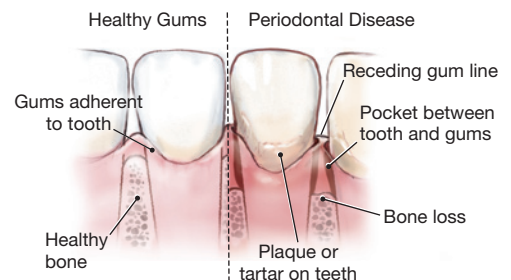
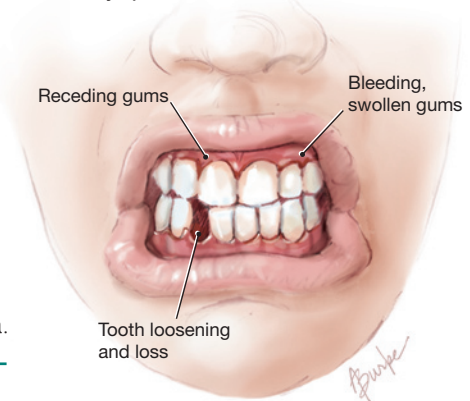
## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Receding or puffy, swollen gums
- Painful gums
- Bleeding when you brush your teeth
- Tooth loss or loose teeth in adults
- Pus draining from the gums
- Bad breath that is not related to food and does not go away

## PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day.
- Use dental floss daily.
- Periodontitis does not cause symptoms initially, so it is important to have regular dental checkups.
- Maintain good nutrition by eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and making sure your diet contains plenty of calcium.
- Do not smoke.
- Control chronic medical problems, especially diabetes (maintaining normal blood sugar levels decreases your risk of infection).
- In severe cases of periodontitis, advanced dental treatments may be offered, including gum surgery, bone grafts, or placement of antibiotics into the gum tissue itself.

Symptoms of Periodontal Disease



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Dental Association  
[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)
- National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research  
[www.nidcr.nih.gov](http://www.nidcr.nih.gov)
- American Heart Association  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

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Sources: National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, American Dental Association, American Heart Association

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