

Healthy gums are pale pink and firm. 20% of the population are genetically prone to getting gum problems. All of us can prevent gum problems that can lead to tooth loss. Follow the advice in this leaflet - aim to keep your teeth for life!

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Family Dental Care

**How to take
care of your
gums**

What are gum problems?

If your gums are red and swollen or bleed with you brush or floss you have gum disease called **gingivitis**. This is caused by plaque or tartar gathering on your teeth. By having your teeth professionally cleaned by your dentist or hygienist then careful brushing and in between cleaning at home, you can stop this disease.

If the gum disease progresses it can destroy the bone around the teeth and open up pocketing around the teeth. This gum disease is called **periodontitis**. Your dentist or hygienist will probe around your teeth at each check up to find out if you have any gum disease and professional scaling and cleaning may be recommended to try and stabilise the gum health. In some circumstances surgical treatment may also be needed to correct deep pocketing. If periodontitis progresses teeth can become loose, painful and may need to be removed.

What effects can gum disease have on my general health?

Periodontitis has been identified as an important emerging risk factor for a number of major medical diseases, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes, as well as for pre-term, low-birth weight babies.

What can I do to prevent gum problems?

- toothbrushing
- stopping smoking
- in-between cleaning
- use of mouthrinse

Brush

Teeth should be brushed twice daily using at least 1450ppm fluoride toothpaste. This removes dental plaque which contains bacteria that cause gum disease and tooth decay. Select a small headed toothbrush with medium bristle and round ended filaments. Replace the brush when the filaments are bent.

You need to clean systematically all tooth surfaces. Use small back and forth strokes cleaning one tooth at a time. You need to clean the outer surfaces, the inner surfaces and then the biting surfaces. This should take 2 minutes. Your teeth should feel very smooth to your tongue when all plaque is removed. Disclosing tablets can help to show areas that are being missed. Powered brushes (mains charged) with an oscillating/rotating action are proved to be useful.

Stop smoking

Smoking will make gum disease worse and we will encourage you, and help you to stop smoking.

Clean in-between

For in between cleaning we will recommend an aid to suit the spaces between your teeth. These may be floss, tape, Tepe interdental, brushes, sticks or a single tufted brush. You should use these daily as instructed by your dentist or hygienist.

Tepe brushes should be pushed gently between the teeth with a back and forth movement. You should feel the brush leaning. If it is loose between the teeth you will need to move up to the next size. Do not force them through if the space is too tight.

Floss down between the teeth and hold it into a 'c' shape around the tooth. Pull it up out between the teeth scraping off any plaque. Wind on to a clean bit of floss and return to the same space this time forming a 'c' against the other tooth then pull up out between the teeth scraping off any plaque. Continue with each space in turn.

Rinse

Mouthrinse may be recommended to help you look after your gums but this is not a substitute for good cleaning. We may recommend a particular mouthwash to treat particular problems in your mouth and these should be used as recommended by the dentist or hygienist.