

Information about gingivitis

What is it and what can you do about it?

You have been given this leaflet because you have been diagnosed with gingivitis. The leaflet provides information to:

- help you improve your gum health;
- prevent more serious gum disease developing in the future.

What is gingivitis?

Gingivitis is inflammation of the gum tissue that supports your teeth. The main cause of this is dental plaque (a mixture of bacteria and food debris). This builds up on your teeth and irritates your gums.

Healthy gums are pale pink in colour and don't bleed when brushed or touched. When you have gingivitis, you may notice that your gums bleed, are swollen or are painful. However, gingivitis is often painless and causes no symptoms. The photo below shows what gums affected by gingivitis look like.



Image showing gingivitis. Note that the gums are red and swollen.

Gingivitis is reversible with treatment. However, if it is not treated, it can lead to periodontitis, an irreversible disease that destroys the bone that holds your teeth in place. Periodontitis is associated with painful, bleeding gums, teeth that look longer and wobbly teeth. In severe cases it can lead to loss of teeth.

What can I do to improve my gum health?

There are several things you can do to improve your gum health.

1. Use a toothbrush to regularly and effectively clean your gums and teeth.

The most important thing you can do is to make sure that you are regularly using your toothbrush (and any other tools your dental team recommends) to remove dental plaque.

- Aim to remove dental plaque from the area where your gums and teeth meet. Do this twice a day and for at least 2 minutes each time. The diagram below shows the angle at which you should try to hold your toothbrush. Aim to brush every surface of your teeth, paying particular attention to where the gums and teeth meet.



Diagram showing the angle at which you should try to hold your toothbrush while brushing your teeth.

You might find that when you start cleaning your gums they bleed. However, you are not causing any damage to your gums, the bleeding is due to inflammation. You should find that after a few weeks the inflammation will settle. Your gums will stop bleeding and will look less red and swollen.

- Use a toothpaste that contains fluoride. You should look on the toothpaste packaging for words like “contains sodium fluoride (1450ppm F)”. The recommended amount of fluoride is between 1350 and 1500 parts per million (ppm) fluoride (F). The toothpaste packaging might look like this:

source: consult a dentist or doctor

Contains: Sodium Monofluorophosphate (1450 ppm F)

Ingredients: Dicalcium Phosphate Dihydrate, Aqua, Glycine, Arginine, Sodium Lauryl Sulfate, Cellulose Gum, Sodium

- When you have finished cleaning your teeth, spit the toothpaste out but don't rinse your mouth. This protects your teeth from decay.
- Turn the tap off while brushing your teeth to avoid wasting water.

2. Clean between your teeth.

- Clean the spaces between your teeth with interdental brushes or dental floss.
- Cleaning between your teeth can be tricky. Seek advice from your dental team about what tools will work best for you and how to use them.

3. Do not smoke.

- People who smoke are more likely to get gum disease and more likely to lose teeth in the long term. We don't yet fully understand how vaping (e-cigarettes) affects the gums.
- If you smoke, stopping will make gum disease treatment more successful. It will also improve your chances of keeping your teeth.
- Stopping smoking is difficult. The dental team can help you and can also direct you to other sources of personalised help.

4. If you have diabetes, aim to keep it well controlled.

- Gum disease is a recognised complication of diabetes, particularly if the diabetes is poorly controlled.
- Attend your diabetic clinic as advised and check with your medical team how well controlled your blood sugar is. Try to keep within the blood sugar limits they advise.
- Let the dental team know about your diabetes. They can arrange for you to be seen more frequently, if they think that this is needed. They will monitor your gum condition and give you advice on what to do to keep your gums healthy.

5. Have a healthy lifestyle.

- Keeping within a healthy weight range, eating a balanced diet and managing stress, where possible, can help your gum health, as well as your general health.

6. Visit your dentist regularly.

- Visit your dental team for regular check-ups. This allows them to spot any new or worsening disease at an early stage.
- The dental team can help you to learn the skills to clean your teeth effectively at home.
- You may need to have treatment from a dental professional to remove hardened dental plaque (known as tartar or calculus) from your teeth to allow you to clean better. This combined approach of home care and treatment will reduce the chance of further problems developing.
- Your dental team will tell you how often you should visit for dental check-ups in the future, based on your own risk level.

This resource may be made available in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on 0131 656 3200 or email altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

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