

# Information about periodontitis

What is it and what can you do about it?

You have been given this leaflet because you have been diagnosed with a gum disease called periodontitis. The leaflet provides information about periodontitis. It also gives advice on stabilising your condition and preventing it becoming more serious in the future.

## What is periodontitis?

Periodontitis is a disease in which the bone holding your teeth in place is destroyed due to inflammation. This inflammation develops when dental plaque remains on the teeth at the gumline, causing irritation of the gums.

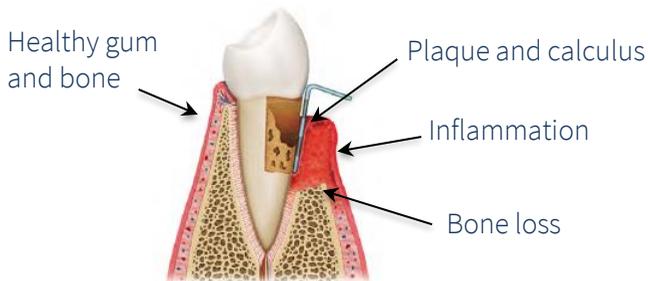


Image showing healthy gum and bone (left side) and inflammation and bone loss (right side) around the tooth.

In the early stage of gum disease, known as gingivitis, the bone holding the teeth in place is not affected. Gingivitis is usually reversible if plaque (a mixture of bacteria and food debris) is removed at home by toothbrushing. The teeth may also need to be cleaned by a dental professional. If gingivitis is not treated, the more serious form of gum disease, periodontitis, can develop.

When periodontitis develops, the bone which holds your teeth in place is destroyed because of inflammation (see image above). This damage is permanent and irreversible. As the bone around your teeth is destroyed, your teeth become loose and in severe cases can be lost altogether. The

inflammation that causes the bone to be destroyed can also affect your general health, particularly if you have diabetes.

## **Symptoms of periodontitis**

Periodontitis isn't always painful, and you might not be aware that you have it. Symptoms include red, swollen gums that bleed when brushed or touched and receding gums. You may notice bad breath or teeth that feel loose or move position. Periodontitis can also lead to gum infections (abscesses).

## **Who is at higher risk of gum disease/periodontitis?**

Anyone can develop the early stage of gum disease (gingivitis). However, some people are at greater risk of developing more serious disease (periodontitis).

Things that increase the risk of developing or worsening periodontitis include smoking, poorly controlled diabetes and a family history of gum disease. The risk of gum disease increases as you get older. Other factors such as stress, obesity and poor diet are thought to increase the risk of gum disease in some people.

## **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 overleaf 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. 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.



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

- 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:

*sources consult a dentist or doctor.*

**Contains: Sodium Monofluorophosphate (1450 ppm F)**

**Ingredients: Disodium 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.

- 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.**
  - 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 also give you advice on how to avoid gum problems progressing.
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](mailto:altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk) to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

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