

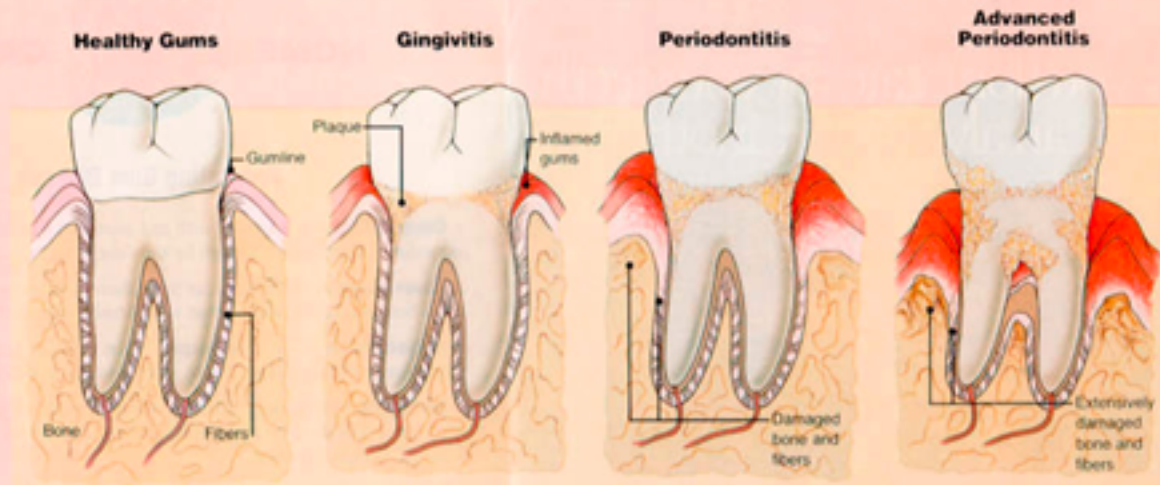
WHAT IS GUM DISEASE?

Gum disease (periodontal disease) is an inflammation or infection that attacks the gums and bone holding your teeth in place. It's caused by the bacteria in plaque, the sticky, nearly colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth. In its early stages, gum disease is called gingivitis. Its later, more serious stage is known as periodontitis. Gum disease can be treated in ways ranging from cleaning to surgery, but it can be prevented by regular brushing, flossing, and professional cleaning.

SYMPTOMS OF GUM DISEASE



THE STAGES OF GUM DISEASE



- 1 Healthy gums are firm and don't bleed. Tiny fibers hold teeth tightly to the gums and underlying bone. The gums fit snugly around the teeth, so plaque can be removed from below the gumline only by flossing and professional cleanings.
- 2 The early stage of gum disease is gingivitis, a mild inflammation of the gums. Plaque and tartar (hardened plaque) have built up at the gumline. The gums have become red and puffy and may bleed during brushing or flossing. The bone and fibers holding the tooth in place are unaffected at this stage, so damage can be reversed.
- 3 At this stage, plaque has moved deeper along the tooth and started an infection that has damaged the bone and fibers supporting the tooth. The gums may separate from the tooth and start to recede. A pocket has formed below the gumline that traps plaque and food debris, perhaps causing persistent bad breath. Treatment can stop further damage.
- 4 In advanced periodontitis, plaque-caused infection has destroyed more than half of the bone and fibers holding the tooth in place. The gums have receded and separated from the tooth and may be painful. The tooth may shift or loosen, and the bite may change. If treatment can't save the tooth, it may have to be removed and replaced to prevent further damage.

COMMON TREATMENTS



Brushing, Flossing, and Cleaning

All help remove the plaque that causes gum disease.



Scaling

Plaque and tartar are scraped off the crown and root of the tooth. Usually performed with root planing.



Root Planing

After scaling, the rough surfaces of the root are smoothed, allowing the gum to heal.



Curettage

This procedure, used with root planing, removes plaque and infected tissue from gum-pocket walls.



Flap Surgery

The gum is lifted from the tooth so diseased tissue can be removed. The bone may also be reshaped.

Other Treatments

Your dentist may recommend additional treatments based on your needs. He may also refer you to a periodontist, a gum-disease specialist.