

Gum disease

Gum disease occurs when the tissue that surrounds and supports the teeth become infected. Gingivitis and periodontitis are the 2 most common forms of gum disease.

Gingivitis is inflammation that affects the gums only. It's caused by a build up of plaque on the teeth and along the gum line, which can cause the gums to become red, swollen and tender. Gingivitis is reversible, but if left untreated, it may lead to the more serious condition of periodontitis.

Periodontitis is a severe and irreversible form of gum disease. It causes a deep inflammation of the gums that affects the bone holding the teeth in place. Periodontitis usually progresses slowly and is often painless. If left untreated, periodontitis may destroy the attachment that holds the tooth in the bone, leaving a space or 'pocket' where more bacteria can collect and cause permanent bone loss. The teeth loosen and may eventually be lost.

Signs and symptoms

Common symptoms of gum disease include:

- bleeding gums when you brush your teeth
- bad breath or an unpleasant taste in your mouth
- redness and swelling
- gums that are receding
- sensitive teeth, and/or
- loose teeth.

Treatment

You can treat gum disease through daily plaque removal at home, and regular monitoring and cleaning by your dental practitioner. Your dental practitioner will help you develop an effective tooth cleaning method and remove calculus from around the tooth and from the root surface (scaling). Having your teeth cleaned by a dental practitioner is a fundamental part of treating any gum disease. Treatment may need to be completed over several appointments and shouldn't be postponed.

Transmission

The major cause of gum disease is bacterial plaque. This colourless, sticky film contains millions of bacteria, and constantly forms on teeth. As you age, your teeth are more at risk from gum disease than other conditions.

Other factors that contribute to gum disease include:

- Plaque that is not removed daily may build up and harden to form dental calculus (tartar). Calculus builds up above and below the gums and cannot be removed by a toothbrush. If calculus is present, the teeth cannot be properly cleaned.
- Poorly shaped fillings, partial dentures, crowns and bridges can make it very difficult to remove plaque.
- Some conditions can make existing periodontitis worse, e.g. pregnancy, diabetes and immune disorders.
- Smoking makes periodontitis worse and may camouflage the problem by reducing blood supply to the gums.

Prevention

- [Brush and floss](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/good-oral-health/brushing-and-flossing) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/good-oral-health/brushing-and-flossing>) every day to remove plaque.
- [Visit your dental practitioner regularly](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/visiting-the-dentist/regular-dental-check-ups) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/visiting-the-dentist/regular-dental-check-ups>).
- Partial dentures need to be carefully designed and should only be made after periodontitis has been treated. In most cases, you should not wear your partial dentures while sleeping.

Health outcomes

Teeth are meant to last a lifetime. Tooth loss due to gum disease is not an inevitable result of aging.

Help and assistance

For more information:

- contact your dental practitioner

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/18/155/66/gum-disease>

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- [find your nearest public dental clinic](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/services/oral-eye-ear/dental-services) (https://www.qld.gov.au/health/services/oral-eye-ear/dental-services)
- call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for confidential health advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Other resources

- What to do in a [dental emergency](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/services/oral-eye-ear/emergency-dental) (https://www.qld.gov.au/health/services/oral-eye-ear/emergency-dental)
- [Dentures](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/braces,-plates,-dentures,-oral-piercings-and-dental-surgery/dentures) (https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/braces,-plates,-dentures,-oral-piercings-and-dental-surgery/dentures)
- [Brushing and flossing](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/about-oral-health/brushing-and-flossing) (https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/about-oral-health/brushing-and-flossing)
- [Regular dental check-ups](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/about-oral-health/regular-dental-check-ups) (https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/oral-health/about-oral-health/regular-dental-check-ups)

healthdirect

- [Gum disease](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/gum-disease) (https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/gum-disease)

Prevention: