



HOW GUM DISEASE AFFECTS OVERALL HEALTH

Learn why the health of your gums is key to a healthy body.

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Your gums are important to a healthy smile because they protect your teeth and mouth. They also act as a barrier against disease-causing bacteria that can enter your bloodstream and damage your body. In fact, the bacteria in gum disease can cause cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, strokes, premature births, and worsen diabetes.

It's important to know what gum disease is, what causes it, the health conditions linked to gum disease, the signs and symptoms of gum disease, and how to properly treat and prevent it. Healthy gums will help give you a healthy smile that lasts a lifetime.

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What is gum disease?

Periodontitis, or gum disease, is a serious infection of the gums that damages the soft tissue and, if left untreated, can destroy the bone that supports your teeth and lead to loose teeth or tooth loss. If you don't properly care for your teeth, you could develop gum disease. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 47% of adults age 30 and over have some form of gum disease, and 70% of adults over 65 have gum disease.

What causes gum disease?

Gum disease starts when plaque – which is made up of food particles, mucus, and bacteria – gets into the small space between your teeth and gums. If you're not properly cleaning your teeth and gums on a regular basis and removing this plaque, it can lead to infection.

There are two stages of gum disease: gingivitis and periodontitis.

Gingivitis is the early stage when your gums become red and inflamed and may bleed. The good news is that gingivitis is reversible. That's why visiting a dentist on a regular basis is so important. If you catch it early, gingivitis won't turn into periodontitis.

Periodontitis is when gum disease starts to damage the gums and the teeth. Pockets form when the gums start to pull away from the teeth. Then the bone that supports the tooth starts to become weak. Over time, the tooth will become loose and may need to be removed.

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Health conditions linked to gum disease

It's not just tooth loss that you need to worry about with gum disease. It can also lead to bigger health problems if left untreated and worsen existing conditions.

- **Diabetes:** People with diabetes are at a higher risk for infections, which means they're more likely to have gum disease.
- **Cardiovascular Disease:** Research shows that inflammation caused by gum disease can increase the risk of heart disease. Gum disease can also make existing heart conditions worse. Some of these heart conditions may require you to take an antibiotic before a dental procedure.
- **Alzheimer's Disease:** Bacteria from gum disease may be able to travel to the brain and lead to the development of Alzheimer's Disease.
- **Respiratory Disease:** Bacteria from gum disease have also been shown to travel to the lungs and contribute to pneumonia among other respiratory illnesses.
- **Cancer:** Studies have shown that men with gum disease were more likely to develop pancreatic, kidney, and blood cancers.

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Signs & symptoms of gum disease

- Bleeding gums
- Swollen gums
- Bright red or purplish gums
- Spitting out blood while brushing or flossing teeth
- Bad breath
- Loose teeth or lost teeth
- Pus between teeth and gums
- Painful chewing
- Receding gums
- New spaces between teeth
- Changes in your bite

How to properly treat gum disease

Visiting a dentist on a regular basis (every six months for a teeth cleaning) means you have a better chance of catching gum disease early. Oftentimes, you won't experience any pain or notice changes in your mouth even if you have gum disease. However, your dentist will be able to see the changes and diagnose you. It's important to properly treat gum disease so you can avoid bigger health complications and tooth loss. Your dentist might suggest increasing the number of cleanings you get each year to prevent further decay, changing your diet, and adjusting the way you clean your teeth. Only your dentist can provide you with the right information for treating gum disease.

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How to prevent gum disease

Properly cleaning your teeth every day is the best way to ensure you don't develop gum disease. We recommend spending 7-10 minutes once a day cleaning your teeth.

- Use a toothbrush to remove plaque buildup from the surface of your teeth. Brushing also reduces the harmful bacteria that live inside your mouth.
- Choose the right toothbrush for your teeth. A soft-bristled toothbrush in the right size will make a difference in how well you clean your teeth. You should also replace it every 3-4 months. Rinse it with hot water after brushing to remove bacteria.
- Electric toothbrushes are very effective at cleaning your teeth. You can hover it over each tooth while it does the job for you.
- Make sure to clean in between your teeth. Wrap the floss around each tooth, hugging it with the floss, and slide it up and down several times to remove plaque.
- Direct water irrigation is also a great tool to clean in between your teeth. Shoot a jet of water between your teeth for five seconds. A Waterpik®, ShowerBreeze®, or any other water irrigating device works great.
- Visit your dentist every six months for a teeth cleaning and exam. Your dentist can monitor your teeth for any changes over time and signs of gum disease.

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Patient Checklist:

Take control of your oral health by printing this daily oral hygiene checklist.

- Spend 7-10 minutes each day cleaning your teeth.
- Floss first. Wrap the floss around each tooth and slide it up and down.
- Rinse your mouth after flossing.
- Use a manual or electric toothbrush to remove plaque buildup from your teeth.
- Rinse your toothbrush with hot water to remove bacteria.
- Use Directed Water Irrigation (DWI) to shoot water directly in between your teeth for 5 seconds in each space and behind the last teeth in the arch. (Water Pic or ShowereBreeze)
- Brushing and flossing loosen the plaque. DWI cleans it out of the mouth.
- Visit your dentist every six months.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months.
- Follow The Dental Medical Convergence on social media.

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Continue to learn about the importance of proper oral care with The Dental Medical Convergence.

At The Dental Medical Convergence, we know that caring for your mouth means caring for your overall health. You need the right information and latest research in order to make healthy decisions. You can't rely on your doctor or dentist to tell you the information you need to know. You need to ask the right questions. We're here to help you do that.

To learn more about the oral systemic connection, and to read the latest research, follow us on social media and at thedentalmedicalconvergence.org.

You can also ask Dr. Chuck questions by sending them to AMA@TheDentalMedicalConvergence.org.