

# Periodontitis: A Dental Disease

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## Editorial

Periodontitis, also called gum disease, is a serious gum infection that damages the soft tissue and, without treatment, can destroy the bone that supports your teeth. Periodontitis can cause teeth to loosen or lead to tooth loss.

Periodontitis is common but largely preventable. It's usually the result of poor oral hygiene. Brushing at least twice a day, flossing daily and getting regular dental checkups can greatly improve your chances of successful treatment for periodontitis and can also reduce your chance of developing it.

Periodontics is the specialty of dentistry that encompasses prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases of the supporting and surrounding tissues of teeth and dental implants. The specialty includes maintenance of the health, function, and esthetics of all supporting structures and tissues (gingiva, periodontal ligament, cementum, alveolar bone, and sites for tooth replacements). Tissue regeneration, management of periodontal-endodontic lesions, and providing dental implants as tooth replacements are, when indicated, integral components of comprehensive periodontal therapy. Tooth extraction and implant site development may accompany either periodontal or implant therapy. Patient management during therapy may include the administration of intravenous conscious sedation.

The goals of periodontal therapy are to preserve the natural dentition, periodontium and peri-implant tissues; to maintain and improve periodontal and peri-implant health, comfort, esthetics, and function

Currently accepted clinical signs of a healthy periodontium include the absence of inflammatory signs of disease such as redness, swelling, suppuration, and bleeding on probing; maintenance of a functional periodontal attachment level; minimal or no recession in the absence of interproximal bone loss; and functional dental implants. In most cases, the development of periodontitis starts with plaque- a sticky film composed mainly of bacteria. If left untreated, here's how plaque can eventually advance to periodontitis:

Plaque forms on your teeth when starches and sugars in food interact with bacteria normally found in your mouth. Brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing once a day removes plaque, but plaque re-forms quickly.

Plaque can harden under your gumline into tartar (calculus) if it stays on your teeth. Tartar is more difficult to remove and it's filled with bacteria. The longer plaque and tartar remain on your teeth, the more damage they can do. You can't get rid of tartar by brushing and flossing — you need a professional dental cleaning to remove it.

Periodontitis can cause tooth loss. The bacteria responsible for periodontitis can enter your bloodstream through gum tissue, possibly affecting other parts of your body. For example, periodontitis is linked with respiratory disease, rheumatoid arthritis, coronary artery disease and problems controlling blood sugar in diabetes.

See your dentist or dental hygienist regularly for cleanings, usually every six to 12 months. If you have risk factors that increase your chance of developing periodontitis — such as having dry mouth, taking certain medications or smoking — you may need professional cleaning more often.