What is Periodontal Disease?

(also called gum disease)

When your gums are infected, it causes them to be swollen, irritated and sore. This is called periodontal disease. This infection can lead to the loss of the bone that supports your teeth which can result in tooth loss. This disease is common and can affect people at any age.

You can have periodontal disease without pain or any other symptoms. This is one of the reasons why it is important to visit the dentist regularly. Regular dental visits allow your dentist to spot and treat problems in their early stages before they become worse.

Periodontal Disease

Healthy | Periodontal Disease

Current estimates show that 75% of North American population has some form of gum infection

ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- **Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste**
- **Clean between your teeth twice daily**
- **Eat a healthy diet and limit snacks**
- **Visit your dentist regularly**

Mouth Healthy™

For more information about taking care of your teeth and gums, visit Mouth-Healthy.org, the ADA's website just for patients.

Periodontal Disease
Keep your gums healthy

What causes periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is caused by plaque that is always forming on your teeth. Plaque contains bacteria that produce acids. If teeth are not cleaned well and constantly , these acids can irritate and inflame your gums.

Healthy gum tissue hugs your teeth tightly. But swollen and irritated gums can pull away from the teeth and form spaces called pockets. These pockets collect more plaque bacteria. If the infected pockets are not treated, the disease will get worse. Bone that supports teeth can get damaged. Over time, the teeth may fall out or need to be removed.

If plaque stays on your teeth, it hardens into a rough substance called tartar. Tartar, unlike plaque, does not brush away, and can only be removed by a professional dental cleaning. You can avoid the build up of tartar with a good oral care routine at home. You can remove plaque by brushing your teeth twice and cleaning in between teeth daily. Keeping your teeth and gums healthy helps prevent tooth loss.

How can I tell if I have periodontal disease?

- **Gums that bleed when you brush or floss**
- **Gums that are red, puffy, or tender**
- **Gums that no longer hug your teeth tightly**
- **Bad breath that doesn't go away**
- **Pus between your teeth and gums**
- **Loose teeth or a change in the way teeth fit together**
- **A change in the fit of partial dentures**

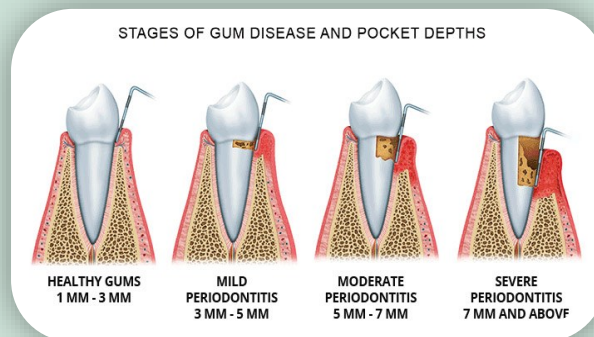**Forms of Periodontal Diseases**

Healthy Gums

Gingivitis

Periodontitis

How does the dentist check for periodontal disease?

Your dentist checks for problems by looking at the color and firmness of the gums. They also use a tool called a periodontal probe to measure how deep the pockets are between the tooth and gum. Very deep pockets are a sign of advanced periodontal disease. During your visit, dental x-rays are also taken which show the amount of bone surrounding your teeth and the dentist will check how your teeth fit together.

STAGES OF GUM DISEASE AND POCKET DEPTHS

HEALTHY GUMS
1 MM - 3 MM

MILD
PERIODONTITIS
3 MM - 5 MM

MODERATE
PERIODONTITIS
5 MM - 7 MM

SEVERE
PERIODONTITIS
7 MM AND ABOVF

How do I keep my gums healthy?

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and for 2 minutes each time.
- Clean between your teeth daily with floss or another inter-dental cleaner
- If you need extra help controlling plaque, your dentist may recommend using a germ-fighting mouth rinse, toothpaste, or other aid.
- Eat a healthy diet for good overall health.
- Don't use tobacco in any form.
- Visit your dentist regularly for an exam and professional cleaning. With regular dental visits, periodontal disease can be detected and treated early on.

Are there treatments for periodontal disease?

The mildest form of periodontal disease is called gingivitis. It makes the gums read and swollen. They may also bleed easily when you brush. The good news is that gingivitis can be fixed. Sometimes all it takes is better oral care at home and more professional cleanings.

The more advanced stage of the disease is called periodontitis. It results in more swelling and redness in the tissues around teeth. It also causes the tissue and bone to break down.

If you have periodontitis, the dentist may recommend a deep cleaning treatment called scaling and root planing. The dentist will carefully remove plaque and tartar down to the bottom of each periodontal pocket. He will also smooth your tooth's root surface s to allow the gum tissue to heal and reattach to your tooth. This usually takes more than one visit.

To control infection, sometimes antibiotics can be placed directly in the pocket after scaling and root planing. The dentist may also prescribe medicines to help control pain or help the area heal.

All dentist's are taught to detect and treat periodontal disease but if the problem is more advanced, he may refer you to a periodontist. This is a dentist who specializes in treating periodontal disease. Periodontists are also skilled in the surgical treatment of the disease.

Periodontal disease will not go away by itself. Preventing and treating the disease in the early stages are the best ways to keep your smile healthy and prevent tooth loss. If you have periodontal disease, follow your dentist's recommendation for treatment and follow –up care.