

# PERIODONTAL (GUM) DISEASE SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS

Gum disease develops when plaque—a sticky substance of bacteria, mucus and particles that builds up on your teeth, causing gum disease—is allowed to build up over time. Although a majority of adults have some level of gum disease, they usually don't show signs until they are in their 30s or 40s. Men are more likely to be affected than women. Although teenagers rarely develop periodontitis, they can develop gingivitis, the milder form of gum disease.

In addition to your dental health practices, there are some other risk factors associated with gum disease that you may want to discuss with your dentist:

- Smoking
- Hormonal changes in women
- Diabetes
- Stress
- Certain medications that cause dry mouth
- Illnesses (such as cancer or AIDS) and their treatments
- Family history (genetics)

## SYMPTOMS

Because symptoms often don't show up until periodontal disease is advanced, routine dental visits are critical. Any of the

following symptoms may signal a serious problem and should be checked promptly:

- Bad breath that won't go away
- Red or swollen gums
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Painful chewing
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth

At your dental visit, you will first be asked about your medical history to identify possible issues (such as smoking) that may contribute to periodontal disease.

Then your dentist will examine your gums and note any signs of inflammation. Using a tiny ruler called a probe, they will check for and measure periodontal pockets. X-rays may be taken to see whether you have any bone loss. Depending on the results of the examination, you may be referred to a specialist who treats gum diseases (periodontist).

If you are advised that you have gum disease, don't delay treatment. Although it is very common, untreated gum disease can progress to a serious condition, resulting in the loss of your teeth.

