

If I lose my teeth due to periodontal disease, can't I just get dentures or implants? Is treating periodontal disease worth it?

Implants are a proven treatment option for missing teeth. Dentures have long been used to help patients continue to eat and preserve their appearance, (although most denture wearers express that they would much rather have their own teeth.) Even so, these solutions can be time consuming and expensive. Most dentists and patients agree that a person's natural teeth are best. Even if a patient needs to have scaling and root planing, surgical treatment, fillings, or crowns; keeping the roots of the teeth in place can be the key to a solid foundation for a healthy mouth and good appearance. Preventing and/or treating periodontal disease is definitely "worth it". A person's smile, attractiveness, ability to chew and enjoy food, and general sense of well being are dependent on good dental health!

Can't I just use strong, over the counter mouth-washes to cure gingivitis or periodontal disease?

Despite what you may have seen in television commercials, a mouth-wash alone cannot control gingivitis, nor can it cure periodontal disease. Certain *prescription* mouthwashes may help, but they cannot be your only weapon.

Will my insurance pay for my periodontal treatment?

Your insurance may pay a portion of your fee but it is unlikely to cover all costs. The good news is that any amount that is covered helps!

FOR REORDERS CALL:
800-548-2164

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PERIODONTAL DISEASE
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Periodontal disease is one of the most common ailments affecting people in today's world. It is also a condition that many people don't understand. This brochure is designed to help explain what periodontal disease is and what we can do about it.

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease can be described as an inflammation and/or infection of the gums and bone which support the teeth. It typically begins with an accumulation of plaque on the teeth and any exposed root surfaces. Plaque is a soft, sticky, bacterial substance that forms on teeth, regardless of the types of foods that are eaten. If left undisturbed, this soft plaque can combine with the minerals in a person's saliva to form calculus, or tartar, which is a hard mineralized deposit, somewhat like cement. Once calculus forms, it provides additional surfaces for bacteria to grow on. It may only be removed by a professional prophylaxis (cleaning) or professional scaling and root planing.

In the early stages of periodontal disease, only the gum tissues are affected. During this stage, which we call "gingivitis", the gums can become red and swollen, and bleed easily. The gums are irritated and inflamed, but the teeth are still firm inside the bone. Gingivitis can typically be controlled by a professional prophylaxis (cleaning) in combination with appropriate home care, such as brushing and flossing. If the gingivitis is not controlled, bacterial plaque and its toxic by-products can overwhelm the mouth's defenses causing the bone to be affected too. If this happens, it can result in unhealthy gum tissue covering bacterially eroded bone. The more the tissue and bone are affected, the more we see the formation of abnormal "pockets" around the roots of the teeth. These pockets can act as little "wells" or "ditches" around each tooth and are magnets for bacteria. More bacteria collect in the pockets, the pockets get deeper and more and more unhealthy, and eventually we can see general bone destruction throughout the mouth. Left untreated, periodontal disease can result in a loss of teeth, as well as contributing to other general health problems.

Do many people have it?

It is estimated that sixty-one percent of adults 25 years and older and eighty-six percent of adults 45 years and older have at least one periodontal disease site in their mouths. This makes periodontal disease an extremely widespread affliction. It is also known that periodontal disease is not just an oral problem, or one that "stays in the mouth". Recent research shows that many types of general health issues are related to periodontal disease. The same mouth "germs" and the in-

flammation they cause have also been linked to diabetes, heart disease, stroke, low birth-weight babies, and even arthritis and other immune system related disorders.

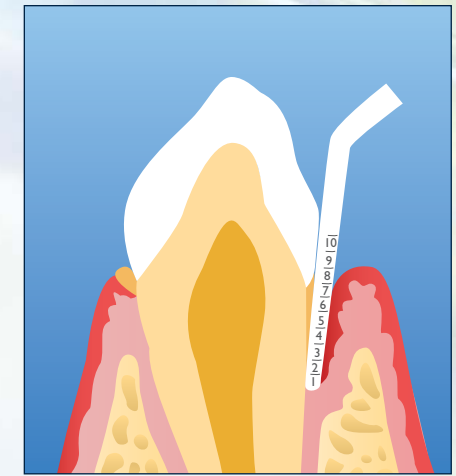
What are the signs and symptoms of periodontal disease?

The word "periodontal" means "around the tooth". Therefore it follows that periodontal disease means an infection and inflammation of the supporting structures, (the gums and bone), surrounding the teeth. While it may appear that the teeth sit inside the gums alone, in reality each tooth sits firmly within a wedge of bone. The root of the tooth is attached to the bone by little fibers which hold it securely in place. The gums cover the bone and the teeth roots. In a healthy mouth, the gum tissues form a little "turtleneck" around each tooth at approximately the same place the enamel of the tooth crown and the tooth root meet. When measured by a periodontal probe (a dental instrument which is like a tiny ruler) this "turtleneck" should measure no deeper than about 3 millimeters (about 1/8 of an inch). Measurements deeper than 3 millimeters signal the possibility of infection and inflammation developing. Why are deeper readings ("pockets") a bad sign? Because as a gum infection progresses, bacteria and the inflammation they cause "eat away" tissues and eventually the bone surrounding the teeth. If enough bone is destroyed, teeth can be lost! An analogy might be — if a house foundation is eaten away by termites, the walls and roof will also cave in. In addition, a mouth infection that is left untreated can keep the body's inflammatory system on "red alert", affecting other body organs and systems.

Warning signs of periodontal disease include:

- Bleeding gums
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth (the teeth look "longer")
- Bad breath or a bad taste in the mouth
- Teeth that appear to be shifting or seem loose
- Changes in the way the teeth fit together (your "bite" seems different)

Amazingly, a person may have periodontal disease without noticing any of these symptoms. Bone may be quietly eroding without



producing noticeable changes until too late. That is why it is so important to have regular dental evaluations that include periodontal probing as well as an examination of the teeth.

Can periodontal disease cause tooth loss?

Yes!

What is the treatment for periodontal disease?

Your dentist and hygienist will set up a plan just for you; however, treatment usually begins with scaling and root planing. Using special dental instruments, calculus (tartar), is removed from the teeth and roots of the teeth. Embedded bacteria and their toxins within the root surfaces are also cleaned away. With these removed, the immune system can begin healing the gums and bone and tamping down inflammation.

In some cases, scaling and root planing, along with patient home care, is enough to get a handle on the disease process. Much of the success for treatment depends on a person's willingness to commit to daily brushing and flossing, along with the use of special cleaning tools (floss threaders, electric toothbrush, or others) designed for special needs. A prescription antimicrobial mouthwash or other type of mouthrinse may also be recommended. If scaling and root planing plus home care do not control or begin to reverse the situation, surgical treatment, including the placement of bone or bone substitutes in deeper bony pockets may be required. After your periodontal disease is under control, you will need to receive *periodontal maintenance therapy*, instead of a standard "cleaning", several times per year. Like high blood pressure, diabetes or asthma, controlling periodontal disease typically depends on continual or possibly life-time maintenance.