



Preventing Periodontal Disease

Periodontal disease is an infection of the gums, which if left untreated, can cause tooth loss in adults. It is usually painless, so it is very important to have regular dental checkups. Periodontal disease is caused by plaque buildup which can damage your gums. There are two stages of periodontal disease: gingivitis and periodontitis.

- **Gingivitis** is the milder form of periodontal disease and it is reversible. The disease only affects your gums.
- **Periodontitis** is the more serious form of periodontal disease. If left untreated, tooth loose may occur.

Periodontal disease increases the risk of premature births and worsens the condition of people with stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis, and respiratory infections. If you are at risk for one of these conditions, take action now to protect your gums.

Pregnancy and periodontal disease

During pregnancy, periodontal disease is common and cause for concern, not only for the mother's oral health, but also for the baby's well-being. One study indicated that mothers with moderate-to-severe gum disease are seven times more likely to give birth to babies who were born too early and weigh too little. Research says the bacteria that causes inflammation in the gums can also trigger the immune system to produce inflammation in the cervix and uterus. Such inflammation can cause premature labor.

Heart disease and periodontal disease

Research says that gum disease creates a higher risk for heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes. In one study, men with extensive gum disease were more than four times as likely to develop heart disease than men with healthy gums.

Diabetes and periodontal disease

For years, we've known that diabetes makes people more susceptible to developing periodontal disease. We also know it makes gum disease more severe once it develops. Diabetes slows circulation, which can make gum and bone tissue more vulnerable to infection. Also, diabetes might reduce the production of collagen, an important component of the tissue that supports teeth.

Research now suggests that periodontal disease may make it more difficult for people who have diabetes to control their blood sugar. More research is needed to figure out the details, but it appears that severe periodontal disease increases blood sugar. This lengthens the time when a person with diabetes experiences a high blood sugar level, which, in turn, increase the risk for diabetic complications.

Daily care to prevent periodontal disease

You can remove plaque by brushing at least twice a day and flossing at least once a day. Flossing removes bacteria and food particles from in between teeth. Rinsing with certain mouthwashes also helps. Even rinsing the mouth with water after eating can reduce bacteria by 30 percent. Remember to also visit your dentist twice a year to remove tartar from places brushing and flossing may miss.

