Periodontal (Gum) Disease Fact Sheet

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We have prepared this Periodontal (Gum) Disease Fact Sheet in order to provide you with a clearer picture of how gum disease begins, how it progresses, how it is treated, and what you can do to prevent/control the disease.

What Is Periodontal (Gum) Disease?

Periodontal literally means "around the tooth." Periodontal or gum diseases are serious infections affecting the tissues surrounding the teeth. These tissues include the gums and bone supporting the teeth. Gone unchecked, periodontal disease can result in tooth loss.

Periodontal disease is usually a slow, painless, progressive disease. Most adults with periodontal disease are unaware they have it. If diagnosed and treated early, however, the teeth can be saved.

What Causes Periodontal Disease?

The main cause of periodontal disease is the accumulation of plaque bacteria. Plaque is an often colorless mass of bacteria that sticks to teeth, crowns and bridges, and other tissues in the oral cavity. Plaque is constantly forming on the teeth. Plaque irritates the gums, causing them to become red, tender, and swollen.

If not removed daily, plaque becomes the hard material known as tartar or calculus. Calculus cannot be removed by brushing and flossing alone. A dentist, periodontist, or hygienist must remove it manually to stop the disease process.

With time, the tissues that attach the gums to the teeth are destroyed by plaque and its byproducts. The gums "pull away" from the teeth and pockets begin to form between the teeth and gums. Plaque and calculus continues to fill these pockets until eventually, the jawbone supporting the teeth is destroyed (See stages of gum disease below).

Health → Gingivitis → Mild → Moderate → Severe
Other factors can modify how your gums react to plaque or calculus, thereby altering your body’s response to the disease and affecting your overall health:

- Smoking/Tobacco Use
- Diabetes
- Stress
- Medications
- Clenching or Grinding Your Teeth
- Pregnancy and Puberty
- Diet and Nutrition
- Immunosuppression (i.e. leukemia, AIDS)

How Is Gum Disease Treated?

Chances are that if you have been diagnosed with periodontal disease, periodontal surgery may be recommended. Surgery is indicated when non-surgical methods are not enough to stop the disease process.

Depending on how advanced your particular case is, treatment may involve any of the following:

- **Scaling and root planing.** Scaling involves the removal of the plaque and calculus deposits on the tooth surfaces, while root planing is the smoothing of the root surfaces in order to promote reattachment of the gum tissue to the tooth. Often times your dentist or hygienist will provide this treatment.

- **Flap surgery** allows the periodontist to gain access to the root of the tooth for removal of plaque, calculus, and diseased tissue. The gum is then carefully sutured back into place. Flap surgery may sometimes be accompanied by minor osseous (bone) shaping or removal in order to ease tissue positioning, facilitate home care, and simplify your maintenance appointments.

- **Bone grafting and guided tissue regeneration (GTR)** involves the use of a biocompatible membrane material, often in combination with a bone graft and/or growth factor, that promotes the growth of lost tissue and bone around your tooth. Not every case is suitable for grafting so ask your dentist or call us for a consultation to see if this procedure can benefit you.
Periodontal Diseases in the US Population

The latest research shows that 92% of us have calculus (tartar) in our mouths, and 3 out of every 4 has calculus beneath the gums, where it causes the most severe damage. Over 1/2 of the adults over the age of 35 are already in the early stages of periodontal disease. In fact, periodontal disease is the primary cause of tooth loss after the age of 35.


What You Can Do...

Periodontal health begins at home. Together with the state-of-the-art treatment methods available today, you can be confident your teeth can be saved. But what can YOU do? Here are some tips for maintaining periodontal health at home:

- Brush your teeth three times daily.
- Floss your teeth at least once a day.
- Eat good, well-balanced meals.
- Avoid sticky, sugary snacks.
- Examine your mouth for signs of periodontal disease regularly (red, bleeding gums).
- Visit your dentist for check-ups and cleanings at least twice a year.

Your dentist is the first line of defense and in the best position to detect the early signs of periodontal disease.

If you have any further questions regarding periodontal (gum) disease or periodontal therapy, ask your dentist or feel free to call us at (210) 492-3519 or email us at lorenzanaperio@yahoo.com and we can address all of your concerns.

The objective of periodontal therapy is to prevent tooth loss. However, if you have already lost one or more teeth due to gum disease, please see our section on Dental Implants - a permanent, conservative tooth replacement alternative.