Gum Disease

What is gum disease?
Gum disease is an infection of the tissues and bones that surround and support the teeth. Gum disease also is called periodontal disease.

There are two types of gum disease—gingivitis and periodontitis.

- **Gingivitis** is a disease that affects only the gums. The gums are the soft tissue that surrounds the teeth. Gingivitis causes your gums to bleed and become swollen. It can be mild to severe, but it can be reversed.

- **Periodontitis** is more serious than gingivitis. The bacteria spread below the gum line and begin to damage the bone and soft tissues that support the teeth. If you do not treat periodontitis, your teeth may become loose, fall out, or need to be removed.

What makes gum disease more likely?
Some of the things that make you more likely to have gum disease include:

- You do not brush and floss your teeth regularly or well enough to remove plaque.

- You smoke or use smokeless (spit) tobacco. Tobacco use makes you more likely to have serious gum disease that results in tooth loss.

- Gum disease runs in your family. If it does, you are much more likely than normal to develop gum disease, even if you take good care of your teeth and gums.

- You are a female experiencing the hormonal changes of puberty, menopause, or pregnancy.

- You have a disease that reduces how well you fight infection, such as uncontrolled diabetes or AIDS.

- You are under a lot of stress. Stress can weaken your immune system and make you more likely to develop infections.

- You take certain medicines. These include seizure-control drugs, calcium channel blockers, cyclosporine, birth control pills, or medicines used to treat cancer (chemotherapy).

What are the symptoms?
Healthy gums are pink and firm, fit snugly around the teeth, and do not bleed easily. Gingivitis causes gums to pull away from the teeth and become red, swollen, and tender. They may bleed easily during brushing or flossing or even if you press the gums with your finger.

In periodontitis, the gums start to pull away from the teeth, leaving deep pockets where bacteria can grow and damage the bone that supports the teeth. The gums may also pull back, making the teeth look longer. You may have lasting bad breath or notice pus coming from your gums. Teeth may become loose, fall out, or have to be removed.
How is it treated?
Treatment depends on how severe your gum disease is.

Gingivitis
- You can often cure gingivitis by regularly brushing your teeth and flossing. Brush your teeth two times a day, in the morning and before bedtime, and floss one time a day. In some cases, your dentist may give you antibiotics to fight the bacteria in your gums and mouth.

Periodontitis
- Tartar is a hard substance that can build up around your gums. Your dentist will remove the plaque and tartar above and below your gum line. This is called root planing and scaling. It makes it harder for plaque to stick to the teeth.
- Your dentist may give you antibiotics to kill bacteria and stop the infection.

Surgery
You may need surgery if other treatments do not control the infection or you already have severe damage to your gums or teeth.
- Gingivectomy removes and reshapess loose gum tissue to get rid of the holes between the teeth and gums where plaque is found.
- A flap procedure allows your dentist to clean the roots of a tooth and repair bone and soft-tissue damage.
- You may need to have some teeth removed.

After surgery, you may need to take antibiotics or other medicines to aid healing and prevent infection. You will also need to brush well after all meals and snacks and to floss daily.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next dentist visit.