

ORAL HYGIENE INFORMATION

GINGIVITIS/PERIODONTAL DISEASE/ORAL HEALTH OVERVIEW

WHAT IS GINGIVITIS?

Gingivitis is an inflammation of the gums caused by bacteria in dental plaque. Some medications and medical conditions can increase the risk of developing gingivitis. Healthy gum tissue should be a light pink color, firm, flat, and completely fill the spaces between the teeth. If the gums are red or purple, puffy and swollen, and bleed when the teeth are brushed or flossed, it is an indication that there is inflammation present.

Gingivitis is a reversible condition. Thorough plaque removal by proper brushing and flossing will allow the gums to heal. It takes a few weeks for the tissues to heal and stop bleeding. It is very important to reduce gum inflammation, as gingivitis can affect overall health and can progress, if untreated, to more serious gum infections known as Periodontal Disease.

WHAT IS PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

Periodontal Disease is an infection of the oral tissues surrounding the teeth. These tissues include the gums, connective tissue, fibrous ligaments, and bone supporting the teeth. Periodontal Disease is the progression of untreated gingivitis and results in the irreversible destruction of the tissues and bone support. Most people do not lose their teeth from cavities; teeth are usually lost when they become loose due to periodontal infections. There usually is no pain or discomfort associated with the early stages of periodontal infections. The key to preventing periodontal disease is to practice good oral hygiene and monitor the health of the gums regularly.

THE EFFECT OF ORAL HEALTH ON OVERALL HEALTH

Good oral hygiene is necessary not only to maintain healthy gums and teeth, but it also contributes to overall health. Gingivitis and periodontal disease are infections and left untreated, they can weaken the body's immune system and exacerbate other medical conditions. Recent medical studies have shown a direct link between diabetes, heart disease, and even premature, low weight babies (when the mother had Periodontal Disease during pregnancy) to Gingivitis and Periodontal Disease. A healthy mouth is an important component of total body health.

HOW CAN I PREVENT GINGIVITIS AND PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

The best way to prevent or reverse gum infections and inflammation is to practice good oral hygiene. Good homecare consists of daily flossing, brushing, and rinsing with antibacterial mouthwashes. It is also important to have regular dental check-ups and cleanings. Dental cleanings remove hard bacteria deposits from the teeth that cause gum disease. Once bacteria has calcified, it can no longer be removed by floss and brushing;

that is why it is very important to floss and brush regularly to remove bacteria while it is still soft.

ORAL HYGIENE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TOOTH BRUSHING:

- It's important to brush at least two times daily (once in the morning and once at night before bed).
- Brush for two minutes each time. It is a good idea to time yourself with a watch to make sure you actually brush the correct amount of time. Most people usually brush for only 30 seconds, so two minutes may seem very long at first.
- It is important to access all surfaces of the teeth with your toothbrush bristles. This includes the front, back, and biting surface. The molars often have deep grooves and can collect plaque and food easily. Try to get your brush bristles in the grooves of the molars and thoroughly scrub. It is okay to use a lot of pressure when brushing the grooves since there is no gum tissue to irritate.
- Always make sure to gently brush around the gum line. It is important to be thorough and remove plaque, but you don't want to irritate or traumatize the gums.
- Try to avoid scrubbing and brushing around in circles; scrubbing can traumatize the gums and just spreads the plaque around instead of removing it.
- The correct tooth brushing method is to angle the brush bristles at a 45 degree angle to the gum line. Start at the gum line and move the bristles away from the gums (on the top teeth you will brush down and on the bottom teeth move the brush up). The best way to control the bristles is to lightly flick your wrist (a sweeping motion) to gently pull the bristles away from the gum line. This sweeping motion helps dislodge the plaque away from the tooth as well.
- It is best to use a small amount of toothpaste when you brush. Just a little squirt about the size of a pea is all you need. When helping a young child brush, make sure they fully spit out the toothpaste and rinse. Toothpaste contains fluoride and should not be ingested.
- When is it time to replace your toothbrush? It all depends on how hard you brush. It is time for a new toothbrush when the bristles are splayed and frayed. Usually this occurs after 3-6 months. Some people are more aggressive and may wear bristles much faster. Generally, you should use a new toothbrush after 3-4 months.

2. FLOSSING METHOD:

- It is important to floss daily to remove harmful bacteria that collects between the teeth (even the best tooth brushing technique cannot access these areas).
- Gum disease often begins between the molars (hardest area to access and clean).
- The best way to floss is to use a technique called the “C”-Shape method. This method gets the floss gently under the gum line and pulls out bacteria.

C-Shape Method:

- a. Cut a large strand of floss; about 12 inches.
 - b. Begin by winding each end tightly around both of your middle fingers (see diagram). Wind floss until it is very taught and you have only 1-2 inches of floss left between your middle fingers.
 - c. Next, using your thumb and index fingers, pinch down on either end of the floss. Now you have a small area of floss that you can easily control and work between the teeth.
 - d. Start by gently wiggling the floss between two teeth. It is easiest to start at one end of your mouth and work your way around in a circuit. Once the floss is between the two teeth and still above the gum line, gently curve the floss around one of the teeth. It should be a tight loop or C-shape.
 - e. Think of the gums in between your teeth as triangles. The goal is to get the floss between the tooth and one side of the triangle. Once you have gently slid the floss under the gum (between the side of the tooth and gum) gently move the floss up and down- a quick shoe-shine motion. Remove the floss and repeat on the other side of the triangle. Continue like that around the mouth until you have flossed between all the teeth.
- *Young children will have difficulty learning how to floss. An easier way for them to floss is to use “Floss Sticks”. Children can hold onto the handle and gently work the floss in between the teeth. Although this method may not get slightly under the gum line as the C-shape method with string floss, it’s much easier for young children and will still remove plaque from between the teeth and minimize their chance of developing tooth decay.*

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAINTAINING GOOD ORAL HYGIENE WHEN YOU HAVE LIMITED SUPPLIES.

1. The goal of oral homecare is to mechanically remove plaque (oral bacteria) found between the teeth and around the gum line.
2. Is it possible to remove plaque and keep the teeth clean if you don't have access to toothpaste or even a toothbrush? The answer is yes. Although a soft toothbrush is the most effective and safe way to clean the teeth, it is possible to improvise in a pinch and remove plaque from the teeth.
3. Suggestions for improvising:
 - **No Toothpaste?** If you have access to baking soda, you can add a drop or two of water to the baking soda and create a thick paste. Baking soda is very effective in removing surface stains and deodorizing the mouth (baking soda is very abrasive and can wear the enamel down over time if it is brushed with every day). You can also just dip the toothbrush bristles in water and gently brush around the gum line. The most important aspect of tooth brushing is the physical removal of plaque. Even a moistened brush will still be effective.
 - **No Mouthwash?** Rinsing with an antibacterial mouthwash is very effective in preventing gingivitis. If you do not have access to a bottle of mouthwash, you can create your own rinse by combining Hydrogen Peroxide (3% is the best; a stronger concentration of Hydrogen Peroxide is not recommended for rinsing) with equal parts water. Hydrogen Peroxide is antibacterial and very effervescent (bubbly) and the foaming action helps the liquid reach all the areas of gum tissue. Rinsing with Hydrogen Peroxide daily should significantly reduce inflammation and bleeding of the gums. If you don't have any Hydrogen Peroxide, you can add salt to warm water. Although salt water in itself is not antibacterial, it does help draw out inflammation from the gum tissues.
 - **No Toothbrush?** Although it is difficult to remove plaque without a toothbrush, there are a couple basic supplies you can use instead. For infants and young children, a good way to clean their gums, and first few teeth, is to use a washcloth. Wet a small washcloth in warm water and wrap part of the cloth tightly around your index finger. Use your covered finger and massage the gums and rub along any teeth present. This will gently remove any bacteria that may be present. For older children with most or all of their teeth, you can use a Q-Tip or cotton tipped applicator. Wet the tip in water or dip in mouthwash, and gently rub the tip back forth along the gum line of each individual tooth. It will take some time but you can remove and loosen most of the plaque deposits this way. If you don't have any Q-Tips, you can use a bobby pin or other similar object and wrap gauze or thin cloth around one end and use as you would the Q-Tip.