

RED ALERT!

If your gums bleed when you brush, or if you notice traces of blood on your toothbrush or in the sink after you rinse your mouth, it may be a warning sign of gum disease.

Scrubbing your teeth vigorously with a hard toothbrush can also lead to bleeding gums, but in most instances any “pink in the sink” can be traced directly back to some degree of gum disease, or at least some accumulation of dental plaque where the teeth meet the gums.

Plaque is a sticky film of bacteria that, if not removed on a daily basis, builds up at the gum line. Any accumulation serves to inflame the gum tissues, which initiates the first step toward gum disease: gingivitis. Gums then become red and irritated, and may bleed when you brush or floss.

It is vitally important to remove dental plaque from your teeth and under the gums. While vigilant dental home care is key, regular, professional cleanings and scaling at your dental office are also vital, to remove the plaque from areas you may not be able to reach, and control any chance of plaque accumulation and subsequent gum inflammation.

Gum disease (“periodontitis” or “periodontal disease”) is a common bacterial infection of the tissues surrounding the teeth. If this infection isn’t taken care of, the gums and bone that support the teeth deteriorate, leading to tooth loss. Periodontitis is usually painless in its early stages, and therefore a “silent” disease. Once it starts progressing however, you may notice some of these indicators of possible gum disease:



- Gums that bleed when you brush your teeth or eat hard foods.
- Red, swollen or tender gums.
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth, or teeth that look longer than before.
- Pus between your teeth and gums.
- New spaces between your teeth.
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste in your mouth.
- A change in the way your teeth or partial dentures fit together when you bite.

Even if the above indicators aren’t obvious, be aware that plaque can be working against your dental health in ways you may not notice on a day-to-day basis. If it accumulates on your teeth, it can inflame your gums and cause a gap to form between the teeth and the gums. Once this “pocket” opens up, the inflammation will continue and potentially lead to bone loss, then loose or missing teeth.

FIGHT BACK AGAINST A PLAQUE ATTACK BY INCLUDING THESE SIMPLE STEPS IN YOUR LIFESTYLE:

1. **Floss every day.** Flossing removes plaque from between your teeth and under your gum line, where your toothbrush can’t reach. Floss before you brush your teeth, preferably before you go to bed at night.
2. **Brush your teeth after eating.** At the very least, brush after breakfast and never forget to brush before you go to bed.
3. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** That means a nutritious diet, and abstaining from tobacco, the use of which has been linked to the development of gum disease and deterioration of overall health.
4. **Visit your dentist regularly** – that’s as frequently as every three months in some cases – for professional cleanings, where the dentist or hygienist will remove any plaque or tartar.

Call for a dental appointment immediately if you notice any possible symptoms of gum disease. The good news is that with proper care, gum disease can often be prevented. Even if it has started, it can usually be treated and halted if you catch it in the early stages.

OUT OF MOUTH, OUT OF MIND

Your teeth, when all present, keep each other in line. When one is knocked out or lost due to dental decay, there can be some unfortunate consequences, including movement of the remaining teeth, (the resulting gap opens up a space for surrounding teeth to drift out of position, shift, or tip into the empty space and change your bite), pains in your jaw, cavities, gum disease and the potential to lose more teeth.

The posterior teeth have an obvious, important role in chewing. As teeth are lost, you'll be forced to chew in other areas, which sometimes leads to excessive wear or erosion of remaining teeth, tooth fractures from overloading, and painful problems with the temporomandibular joints that unite the lower jaw with the skull.

In addition, as soon as a tooth is lost, the surrounding bone starts to deteriorate. How quickly this happens will depend on the bone's density, your bite and how well your teeth align with each other. In some cases the loss of a back tooth can eventually cause a deterioration in facial appearance due to lower facial height.

Please talk to us about replacements for any missing teeth. Early intervention is paramount. A replacement tooth will keep your other teeth in line and help you avoid the possibility of orthodontic and other dental treatments down the road.

Missing a back tooth? Most people don't consider it as important as missing a front tooth. You should be aware, however, that even if a gap in the back isn't visible in your up-front smile, there are very good reasons why you still need to replace any missing back teeth, the sooner, the better.

ORAL CANCER: THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DIAGNOSIS



According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, mouth and throat cancers are the sixth most common cancers identified in U.S. males, and the fourth most common in African American men. Thirty-thousand people in the U.S. are diagnosed with mouth and throat cancer each year, and 8,000 die of these cancers. That's almost one per hour, every day of the year. Similarly, the Canadian Cancer Society estimates that 3,200 new cases of oral cancer were diagnosed in Canada in 2007, with an estimated 1,100 patients succumbing to the disease.

Even more tragic about these death rates is that oral cancer has an 80 to 90 percent chance of being cured if it is diagnosed and treated immediately. The key is to recognize the symptoms early.

You may think of your regular dental checkup only as a chance to check for dental decay, and an opportunity to clean and shine your teeth a couple of times a year. What you may not be aware of is that while we're checking your gums and teeth, we're also looking all around your mouth for early signs of oral cancer, which in most cases doesn't hurt and therefore may not be noticed by a patient.

Here are some indicators you can watch out for:

- Any irritation or swelling on the lip or in the mouth.
- A lump in the neck that lasts longer than two weeks.
- Velvety red or white patches in the mouth.
- Ulcers or sores in the mouth that do not heal.
- A lump in the lip, mouth, gums, tongue or neck, or a thickening in the cheek.
- Bleeding in the mouth.
- Pain in the mouth that won't go away.
- Loose teeth, or dentures that no longer fit.

While these symptoms do not automatically mean you have cancer or a pre-cancerous condition, they do necessitate an immediate appointment with your doctor or dentist.

Please call us if you have any questions about oral cancer, and about its signs, symptoms and treatment.