



# Periodontal Disease and Your Health

What Your Dentist  
Can Do for You



*Ordre des dentistes  
du Québec*



### What are the signs of periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease generally is not painful and rarely has any symptoms. The two main signs are bleeding gums when you brush, and bad breath. Your gums may also be red and inflamed.

In some people, untreated gingivitis can turn into periodontitis. At that point, the bones that hold teeth in place start to deteriorate. Without treatment, teeth become loose and have to be removed.

The main factors contributing to periodontal disease are:

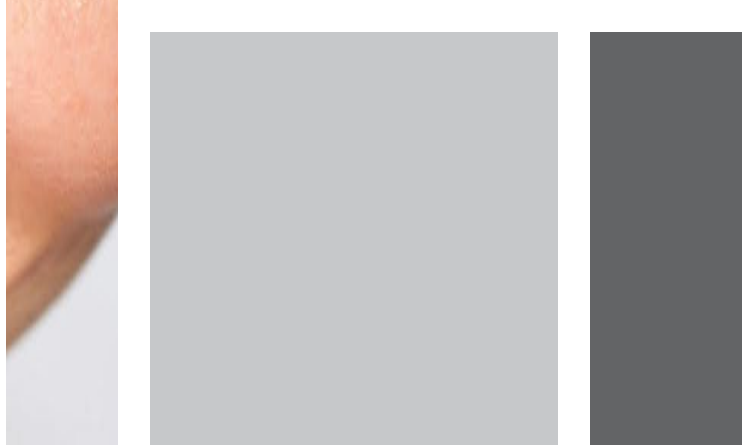
- inadequate dental hygiene;
- conditions that weaken the immune system, such as thyroid disorders, diabetes, pregnancy or leukemia;
- hereditary factors;
- smoking, which reduces blood circulation in the gums and can alter the bacterial composition of your mouth and your body's immune response to periodontal bacteria;
- some drugs.

Any combination of these factors can cause the disease to progress more quickly.

## Periodontal disease

Aside from cavities, periodontal disease – also known as gum disease and gingivitis – is the main oral health problem for adults and the elderly. It is an inflammation of the gums, caused mainly by the accumulation of dental plaque and tartar. Periodontal disease can affect the bones that hold teeth in place and eventually lead to tooth loss.

Dental plaque is an invisible, sticky film of bacteria that builds up on teeth. It is produced by a combination of various bacteria, food particles and saliva. It tends to build up most heavily between the teeth and just below the gum line. Over time, plaque turns into tartar, a hard, grainy substance that has to be removed regularly.



## How can periodontal disease affect your health?

Studies have found links between periodontal disease and some other illnesses.

It may be a risk factor for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. The bacteria that cause periodontal disease may contribute to atherosclerosis, shrinkage of the artery walls that can lead to an obstruction.

Some studies have found links between gum disease in pregnant women and premature or underweight births. Mothers with periodontal disease are up to seven times more likely to have premature or underweight babies.

Finally, bleeding gums, bone loss and an increase in pocket depths may be an early indicator of diabetes. Diabetics are more susceptible to periodontal disease and often require more periodontal care than non-diabetic patients.

**Periodontal disease  
is the main cause  
of tooth loss  
among adults.**

## Periodontal screening

Periodontal screening is a fast and effective method of assessing the condition of your gums and diagnosing periodontal disease. Early detection simplifies treatment and avoids potential tooth loss.

Your dentist uses a special instrument during your oral examination to measure the depth between your teeth and gums. It should be shallow if your gums are healthy. If the examination shows a problem, a more detailed examination will be necessary.

The results are noted and kept as a baseline for future examinations.

## Treatment

Your dentist can diagnose and treat periodontal disease as soon as it appears. If necessary, more serious or advanced cases may be referred to a periodontist, a specialist in the treatment of periodontal disease.

The purpose of periodontal treatment is to restore healthy gums. It usually involves scaling (the removal of plaque and tartar build-up on teeth), root planing (to smooth tooth roots after cleaning) and curettage (scraping off plaque and inflamed gum tissue). More advanced cases may call for surgical treatment. Periodontal disease cannot be treated with mouthwash or other solutions.



## **For a healthy mouth and a healthy body**

To prevent gum disease, see your dentist twice a year and make sure you clean your teeth properly by brushing them several times a day and flossing daily.

**For more information:**

**[www.odq.qc.ca](http://www.odq.qc.ca)**

