



Stages of periodontal disease

The first stage of periodontal disease is called gingivitis. Gingivitis is the build-up of plaque due to poor brushing and flossing habits. In this stage, gums can turn red and swell and may bleed with brushing or flossing. The effects of gingivitis can be reversed with a regimen of daily brushing and flossing along with regular cleanings. If left uncontrolled, gingivitis could lead to the more advanced stage of periodontal disease called periodontitis.

Periodontitis, the second stage of periodontal disease, is an infection of the tissues that hold your teeth in place. The built-up plaque hardens under the gum line. The gums then pull away from the teeth, creating a pocket that can lead to bone and tooth loss. Your dentist makes the initial diagnosis of periodontal disease and many dentists can also treat it, particularly in its early stages; a periodontist, a gum specialist, may also be consulted for more advanced diagnosis and treatment.

Signs of periodontal disease

Because periodontal disease is often painless, you may not know you have it until damage has already been done. Check your mouth regularly and visit your dentist should you find any of the following signs of disease¹:

- Bleeding gums when brushing or flossing teeth.
- Red, swollen, or tender gums.
- Gums that have pulled away from teeth; part of the tooth's root may show, or your teeth may look longer.
- Pus between the teeth and gums (when you press on the gums).
- Bad breath.
- Permanent teeth that are loose or moving away from each other.
- Changes in the way your teeth fit when you bite.
- Changes in the fit of partial dentures or bridges.

How is periodontal disease treated?

In the early stages of periodontal disease, your dentist will use deep cleaning to remove the hardened plaque and infected tissue, then smooth the damaged root surfaces of the teeth. This process allows the gum to reattach to the teeth. An antibiotic rinse may also be applied to help control the infection. Once a deep cleaning has been performed, it is imperative that the individual maintains a regular brushing and flossing schedule to keep the plaque from building up again. If periodontitis is far too advanced, gum surgery may be necessary.

¹ <http://www.diabetes.org/type-1-diabetes/mouth-care.jsp>

UnitedHealthcare Dental®

UnitedHealthcare Dental® coverage provided by or through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or its affiliates. Administrative services provided by Dental Benefit Providers, Inc., Dental Benefit Administrative Services (CA only), United HealthCare Services, Inc. or their affiliates. Plans sold in Texas use policy form number DPOL.06.TX (11/15/2006) and associated COC form number DCOC.CER.06.