

## COLUMN Gum Disease 101

### Tooth loss, Arthritis, Diabetes, Heart Disease and more...

It is estimated that 78 percent of the adult population have some form of gum disease. Unfortunately many people are not aware that this condition affects a lot more than just the mouth. Research shows that periodontal disease is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, strokes, bacterial pneumonia, increased risk during pregnancy, and most recently, Rheumatoid Arthritis. Researchers have long known about a link between gum disease and rheumatoid arthritis, but they haven't known why the two were connected. New research shows that the bacteria that causes gum disease can worsen rheumatoid arthritis, leading to early onset and speeding up its progression. This means increased damage to bone and cartilage. Gum disease can lead to chronic inflammation and destruction of the cartilage in the joints of these patients.

My goal this month is to educate you on how an infection in the mouth can have serious adverse effects on the rest of the body.

#### Here are some questions my patients have asked about Periodontal (Gum) Disease:

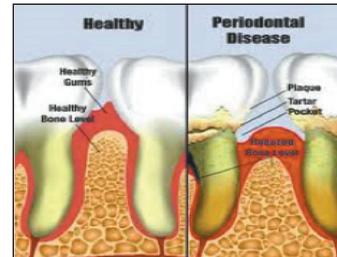
#### What exactly is Periodontal Disease?

Gum (Periodontal) Disease is an infection in your mouth that destroys the bone that holds



Dentally Speaking  
by  
Jeffrey S. Haddad

your teeth in. Periodontal disease is **treatable** but it is not **curable**. Once you have the infection and the damage is done (meaning you have lost bone around your teeth) we can slow or stop the disease from progressing but we cannot regrow the bone. Left untreated it will eventually result in tooth loss.



#### How would I know if I had gum disease?

Most of the time, people have no idea that they have gum disease because it is usually *painless*. During your routine dental visits you may notice that the hygienist or dentist is taking measurements around each tooth. This is a screening for periodontal disease. A small probe is used to measure the tissue and bone supporting the tooth. The measurement is taken in millimeters. Typically measurements over 3mm can mean you have periodontal disease.

Other symptoms include:

- Bleeding, red, swollen or tender gums
- Persistent bad breath
- Loose or moving teeth or a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite

#### What causes gum disease?

**BACTERIA**-There are countless bacteria in your mouth. These bacteria in your mouth are the same bacteria associated with heart disease and other systemic conditions. When you wake up in the morning and your teeth feel *fuzzy*-this is called plaque; you are able to remove this bacteria by brushing and flossing. When this bacteria isn't removed daily it can harden and turn into calculus, also called tartar. Think of tartar like barnacles on a boat, once the tartar has formed on your teeth, you can NOT remove it yourself. It will take a professional dental cleaning to remove it. Your body responds to this tartar similar to how it would respond to a sliver - the tissue starts to get red and swollen and eventually an infection appears. Left untreated,

this infection starts to destroy the bone around your teeth and it will continue to cause destruction until the tartar or sliver is removed.

#### Are there things that may put me at a higher risk for periodontal disease?

- Smoking and chewing tobacco release hazardous chemicals and toxins
- Older dental work or failing dental work can trap bacteria
- Family History/Genetics - some people are more susceptible to these infections
- Poor oral hygiene

#### How can I prevent gum disease?

1. Brushing 2-3 times per day (preferably with an electric toothbrush).
2. FLOSSING!!! This is the MOST important tool you have to avoid gum disease and tooth loss. My patients always ask me if they have to floss. I tell them that "they only have to floss the teeth that they want to keep!" Flossing is the key to keeping your periodontal health in order.

My best recommendation is regular dental exams and cleanings. Periodontal disease is known as the "silent killer." **It very rarely hurts until it is way too late.** Periodontal disease is a very serious condition of the mouth that also has significant effects on the rest of the body. The first line of defense is identifying if you have signs of the disease, and seeking professional dental help to address it. This is a very treatable condition and should be taken seriously. Not only could it result in the loss of your teeth, but it could contribute to negative effects on your overall health.

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*Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S. of Doolin & Haddad Advanced Dentistry completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ disorders and practice management. For more information, visit [www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com](http://www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com).*