

SO YOU'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH PERIODONTAL DISEASE

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is an inflammatory disease. The inflammation in your gums is one of the body's natural defense mechanisms in response to a build-up of plaque (now referred to as a biofilm) bacteria on the teeth. In some patients, this natural inflammatory process is too severe or poorly controlled and it can damage the supporting structures of the teeth, namely gum, ligament and bone.

Who gets periodontal disease?

Approximately 15% of the population are severely affected by periodontal disease but milder forms of disease can affect around 80% of people by the age of 60. There appears to be some genetic link with periodontal disease, with trends running in families. If you have been diagnosed with periodontal disease, then potentially your siblings are at increased risk of having the problem and potentially your children may be at increased risk. Ideally they should all be screened and monitored for potential problems by their general dentist. Other risk factors for gum disease include smoking (see below), poor diet, stress and diabetes.

Can it be treated?

Periodontal disease can be treated successfully, however we cannot cure it. Similar to diabetes, there is no cure, but by controlling the disease, we can prevent further damage and allow you to keep your teeth for a long time.

What can I do to help?

Your role in the management and control of the disease is crucial. We will show you techniques aimed at cleaning your teeth to a very high standard with the aim being that you remove the biofilm that the body reacts to. If you are a smoker, then stopping or reducing smoking will help. Smoking is the number one modifier of periodontal disease making the disease process more damaging and less responsive to treatment. You are at least 4 times more likely to have gum disease if you are a smoker. Should you wish to quit smoking, the best people to speak to are your GP and medical practice nurses. We are also happy to offer advice. A healthy balanced diet is also important in the prevention and stabilisation of periodontal disease.

What sort of treatment will I need?

Most periodontal disease can be treated effectively with thorough removal of the biofilm and deposits of calculus (calcified biofilm) that stick to the teeth. This treatment is carried out by the hygienist who is specially trained in these techniques. However this treatment is only successful if an optimal level of oral hygiene is achieved at home so emphasis will be placed on this aspect of your treatment, especially in the early stages. Occasionally, in more severe cases, further treatment may be required in the form of drug therapy or surgery and you would probably be referred to a Specialist in Periodontics if this were the case.

What if I don't have treatment?

If the bone loss around the teeth is not controlled then teeth may become loose, the gums may shrink and in some cases teeth may become infected or even fall out. There is also compelling evidence that untreated periodontal disease can have effects on general health.

What next?

You will be referred to the hygienist for a full assessment and then appropriate treatment. She will not start your treatment until your oral hygiene has reached a sufficiently high standard. ***It is very important that you bring all your oral hygiene aids (brushes, floss, interdental brushes etc) to each appointment with the hygienist*** to enable her to review your cleaning techniques and modify these as required.

Do not hesitate to ask your dentist or hygienist if there is anything that you do not understand about periodontal disease - we're here to help!

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