



Dental

# Preventing and treating dental disease

Tooth decay and gum disease are common conditions that affect most people during their lifetime. Both can be painful and expensive to treat. It's important to know that science is showing links between dental disease — especially gum disease — and overall health. With good home care, a healthy diet and regular dental care, you can avoid dental health problems.

## How dental disease begins:

Like all diseases in the mouth, tooth decay and gum disease starts with germs called “bacteria” that cling to your teeth. These germs are part of a sticky film called “plaque” that cover teeth. The bacteria in plaque causes infections in the mouth. The two most common are tooth decay and gum disease.

Tooth decay leads to cavities which must be treated or they will get bigger. A dentist will remove the decay from your tooth and then fill the cavity with a silver or white filling. Your dentist may refer cavities as “dental caries.”

Gum disease is an infection of the tissue that holds your teeth in place. It has been linked to more serious health issues, like:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Problems during pregnancy

Your dentist may refer to gum disease as “periodontal disease.”

## Symptoms of a cavity include:

- Pain in the tooth
- Sensitivity to hot or cold food and/or beverages
- Bad breath



## In brief:

- Gum disease is linked to health conditions like diabetes and heart disease. It can even cause pregnancy problems.
- Brushing and flossing every day may prevent dental disease. You should also go to the dentist.
- Talk to your dentist for advice about your dental health.

## Symptoms of gum disease include:

- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that bleed when you brush
- Bad breath
- Loose teeth
- A change in the way your teeth fit together

Gum disease usually isn't painful, so often people don't know they have it until damage has been done. When your gums become infected, germs may enter your blood or lead to harmful irritation. This can make other health conditions you have worse. Gum disease can make it hard for those with diabetes<sup>1</sup> to control their blood sugar and is linked to or heart disease<sup>2,3</sup> and problems in pregnancy.<sup>4</sup>

## Preventing dental disease.

While your dentist can treat dental diseases, preventing them is best. Follow these tips:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day using fluoride toothpaste. Be sure to brush along the gum line
- Floss at least once a day to clean between your teeth and under your gums
- Eat foods from all the food groups: fruits and vegetables, dairy, meats and proteins, and grains
- Avoid sweet snacks and sugar-filled sodas. When you do eat sugary foods or drinks, rinse your mouth with water. Brush as soon as possible
- Drink plenty of water
- If you're pregnant or have diabetes or heart disease, take extra care of your gums. Tell your dentist about any signs of gum disease
- Don't smoke. Smokers often have more trouble with their teeth and gums, including lost teeth
- See your dentist regularly. This way, your teeth will be cleaned and any problems may be found

Take care of your mouth every day, and your teeth and gums will last a lifetime.



<sup>1</sup> American Diabetes Association, Effect of Periodontal Treatment on Glycemic Control of Diabetic Patients, *Diabetes Care*. 2010 February, 33(2), PMID: PMC2809296, doi: 10.2337/09-1378.

<sup>2</sup> Lockhart, PB, et al, Periodontal Disease and Atherosclerotic Vascular Disease: Does the Evidence Support an Independent Association? A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association, *Circulation*. Published online April 18, 2012, <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/early/2012/04/18/CIR.0b013e31825719f3>.

<sup>3</sup> Cardiovascular Disease: Grau AJ, et al. Periodontal disease as a risk factor for ischemic stroke. *Stroke* 2004 Feb; 35(2): 496-501.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffcoat M, Parry S, Sammel M, Clothier B, Catlin A, Macones G. Periodontal infection and preterm birth: successful periodontal therapy reduces the risk of preterm birth. *BJOG*. 2011; 118(2):250-256.

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