Taking care of

Gum Disease

Open Door
HEALTH CENTER
Your Community Health Center
What is gum disease?

Periodontal disease, also known as gum disease, is an infection that affects the tissues and bone that support your teeth.

Healthy gum tissue fits tightly around each tooth. When a person has gum disease, the gums pull away from the tooth. As the disease progresses the tissues and bone that support the tooth are damaged. The teeth may fall out or need to be removed. Preventing gum disease early can help prevent tooth loss.

Gum disease has been linked to other diseases. People with diabetes or heart disease are more likely to have gum disease. Strokes and high stress may also be related to gum disease. Gum disease needs to be controlled and treated; it does not go away on its own.
Warning signs of gum disease

- Bleeding gums when brushing or flossing
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that are pulled away from your teeth
- Bad breath that does not go away
- Pus between your gums and teeth
- A change in the way your teeth fit when you bite
- A change in the fit of your partial dentures

What causes gum disease?

Gum disease is caused by plaque, a sticky film that is always forming on teeth. Plaque contains bacteria that cause irritation and inflames your gums.

Inflamed gums can pull away from the teeth and form spaces called “pockets.” Since these pockets are inflamed they then collect more bacteria. The gum disease gets worse if the infected pockets are not treated.
Who is at risk for gum disease?

Anyone is at risk for gum disease. There are some things that can increase a person’s risks:

- Poor oral health
- Tobacco use. People who use chewing tobacco or smoke are more likely to have gum disease.
- Diseases such as diabetes and AIDS lower your resistance to fighting infections. If you have one of these diseases, you are more likely to develop gum disease.
- Medications: Certain medications can affect your gums by reducing salivary flow, which can affect soft tissues and make tooth decay more likely.
- Teens, pregnant women and those taking birth control pills change hormone levels. These changes can make gums more sensitive to plaque.
- Genes sometimes play a role. If your parents have dentures, or you have a history of tooth loss, you are more likely develop gum disease.
- The bacteria that cause gum disease may be transferred from parents to children through sharing food, silverware and drinks.

How can I prevent gum disease?

- Brush two times a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss or use other interdental cleaners once daily to help remove plaque and food that your toothbrush can’t reach. Flossing is the only way to clean between your teeth.
- Your dental care team may recommend an antiseptic mouthwash to help kill the bacteria.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly: when plaque stays on your teeth it hardens and is called tartar (“also called calculus”). Professional cleanings are the only way to remove tartar.
A. Healthy: Teeth are held in place firmly by gums, bone and gum ligament. There is little or no buildup of plaque and tartar.

B. Gingivitis: Bacteria in plaque irritate gums, making them red, swollen, tender and very likely to bleed. If plaque is not removed, it turns into hardened tartar.

C. Periodontitis: Plaque and tartar buildup along the gumline, breaking down the soft tissues that support teeth. As the disease progresses it attacks the bone and breaks down the bone.

D. Advanced Periodontitis: More bone and periodontal ligament have been damaged. The gums pull away from the teeth. Teeth may become loose and need to be removed by a dentist.
Diagnosing gum disease

Your hygienist will use a periodontal probe to gently measure the pockets around each tooth. Healthy pockets are less than three millimeters. The more severe the disease, the deeper the pocket.

Dental x-rays are another good way to check for amount of bone supporting the teeth. In some cases, your dental team may recommend you see a periodontist (a dentist who specializes in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of gum disease.)

X-ray A: Showing healthy bone level
X-ray B: Showing bone loss due to gum disease
Treating gum disease

If the disease is caught in the early stages (gingivitis), all you may need is a professional cleaning. Your dental team will educate you on improving your daily oral hygiene.

Some patients develop more severe disease and need a more complex cleaning. This is called Scaling and Root Planing. The dental hygienist carefully removes plaque and tartar down at the bottom of each pocket. The tooth’s root surfaces are cleaned and smoothed. This helps the gum tissue to heal and reattach to the tooth. This treatment is also known as “gum cleaning” or “deep cleaning,” and the process takes four appointments.

After your Scaling and Root Planing cleaning is complete, your next follow-up appointment will be in three months. Your hygienist will measure the pocket depths to see if Scaling and Root planning was successful. If the pockets have deepened and more supporting bone has been lost, more treatment will be necessary. This is when you would be referred to a periodontist.

Scaling

Removes plaque and tartar beneath the gum line.

Root Planing

The root surfaces of the tooth are smoothed.
Care after treatment

After your Scaling and Root Planing is completed, more than likely you will need to return for more frequent cleanings.

Brushing twice a day and flossing daily is going to help prevent plaque build-up.

Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) and ibuprofen (such as Advil) are two medications recommended to help with discomfort after cleaning. Warm salt-water rinses also help soothe the tissues.

You may notice some sensitivity or soreness after your cleaning is complete; this is normal. This may make you want to avoid cleaning the areas. It is very important to keep brushing your teeth and gently flossing to remove plaque. We recommend a toothpaste for sensitive teeth (such as Sensodyne) after your cleaning.

If you are a tobacco user, our qualified medical or dental team is happy to help you with this.
Is my insurance going to cover this?
We encourage you to contact your insurance company to see if scaling and root planing is covered. Each insurance company chooses which procedures it covers. If they don’t cover this cleaning, you can discuss payment options with someone from our finance team. Treatment should be determined by your dental team and yourself, not by your benefits plan. Keep in mind that having gum treatment now may be less expensive than replacing a tooth lost to disease in the future.

Good oral hygiene at home
Good oral hygiene becomes very important when you have gum disease, it helps the disease from becoming more serious. Daily cleanings help keep plaque under control and reduce the amount of tartar build-up.
How to Brush

Place the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to the gums.

Move the brush back and forth gently in short strokes.

Brush the outer surfaces, the inside surfaces and the chewing surfaces of all teeth.

To clean the inside surface of the front teeth, tilt the brush vertically and make several up-and-down strokes.

Brush your tongue with sweeping motions from back to front. This removes bacteria and keeps your breath fresh.
How to Floss

Use about 18 inches of floss wound around one of your middle fingers, with the rest wound around the opposite middle finger.

Hold the floss tightly between the thumbs and forefingers and gently insert it between the teeth.

Curve the floss into a “C” shape against the side of the tooth.

Rub the floss gently up and down, keeping it pressed against the tooth. Don’t jerk or snap the floss.

Floss all your teeth. Don’t forget to floss behind your back teeth.
Other Services:

Behavioral Health
*Mankato location only*

- Outpatient therapy
- Child, couples and family therapy
- Trauma counseling/therapy
- Substance abuse assessments

- Anxiety & depression screening
- Support groups

Medical

- Family practice medical care
- Exams and physicals for all ages
- Immunizations
- Same day visits and consultations
- Immigration physicals and refugee assessments
- Prenatal care
- Chronic disease management (diabetes and high blood pressure)
- Free breast & colon cancer screenings for those who qualify (through Sage and Sage Scopes)
- Wellness coaching – including nutrition, fitness & tobacco cessation
- Full laboratory onsite
- Registered dietitian consultations
- Referrals for specialty care

Insurance Enrollment Services

Medical insurance navigation and enrollment services and Medical Assistance enrollment - services are free of charge, and available to the public