

What will it mean if I need treatment for periodontitis?

Extra dental visits

- > for your current treatment needs
- > a follow-up visit after treatment is completed, to check that your gums are staying healthy
- > gum diseases tend to recur - you may need ongoing maintenance visits.

Changes to your oral care routine

- > tips on how to brush away all plaque on and between your teeth, and next to the gum line.
- > how to use dental floss or interdental brushes.
- > follow-up visits to check problem areas with brushing and flossing.

Advice on quitting smoking

- > **Phone Quitline**
Australia: 137 848 (13 QUIT)
New Zealand: 0800 778 778

Your dentist may refer you to a dental specialist in gum diseases - a periodontist.

Acknowledgement:

Colgate Periodontal Education Program | Colgate Oral Care

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How is Periodontal Disease Diagnosed?

Periodontal disease is a disease of the gums that, in its most severe form, may cause tooth loss.

Periodontal disease may develop with no awareness on your part.

The earlier periodontal disease is identified and treated, the better the long-term outlook.

What is your dental practitioner looking for in a periodontal examination?

Your dental practitioner is looking for signs of change in the normal healthy gum tissue. This change may be noticeable in the shape, size, appearance and texture of the gums.

There may be specific areas where the gums appear red and swollen, and bleed easily (gingivitis). Your dentist will look for the plaque and calculus build up that has caused these changes.

Your dental practitioner will also assess the ability of the gums to heal, and discuss the required treatment with you.



Figure 1. Healthy Gums



Figure 2. Gingivitis

What does a periodontal examination involve?

A periodontal examination involves a thorough inspection of your gums, including measurement of periodontal pocket depths, and assessment of plaque and calculus levels.

What are periodontal pockets?

Periodontal pockets are pouches that form where plaque has built up under the gum. They are signs of more serious gum disease (periodontitis). As the disease progresses, it causes some loss of the bone supporting teeth.

Periodontal pockets are measured by a periodontal probe which has different lengths marked upon it. It is different to the probe used to examine teeth for decay.

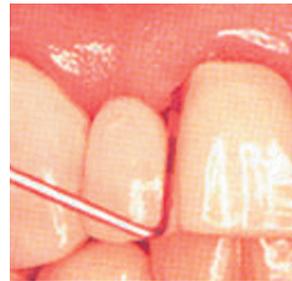


Figure 3. Measuring pocket depth with a periodontal probe

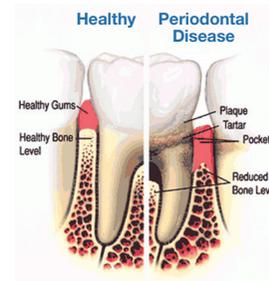


Figure 4. Diagram of tooth showing healthy and diseased gums

Bleeding may occur if the gums are inflamed, and this will also be noted. Bleeding gums are one of the clearest signs of gum disease.

Bleeding gums (gingivitis) are a sign to seek professional help and to check oral hygiene habits.

To further confirm the presence of periodontitis, your dental practitioner may take X-rays. X-rays reveal information that cannot be seen by the naked eye and therefore help the dental practitioner in making an accurate diagnosis.



Figure 5. Bone loss

X-rays also help determine if other factors may be contributing to periodontal problems, for example, irregular and poorly-shaped fillings that may cause food and plaque retention between teeth.

In the late stages of periodontal disease, your teeth may become loose and drift in your mouth.

Mobility is checked by gently pushing the teeth on either side with the end of a periodontal probe.

Periodontal disease may worsen without treatment, and lead to eventual tooth loss.

How is periodontal information recorded?

Details of your teeth are recorded on a chart or form.

When your gums are probed, measurements will be taken of both how much your gums have receded and the depth of any periodontal pockets. You may hear these figures being called out to the dental assistant who will note them in your record. Bleeding, plaque and calculus presence will also be recorded, along with written comments on gum appearance, texture and shape, and any relevant medical or dental history.

The initial examination provides information that helps your dental practitioner monitor your periodontal condition. The initial examination notes may be referred to throughout the treatment process.

With all this information a diagnosis can be made and a treatment plan designed especially for you.

The periodontal examination is very thorough and may take longer to complete than you expect.
