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 defence 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 an increased risk of having the problem and potentially your children may be at an increased risk. Ideally they should all be screened and monitored for potential problems by their general dentist.

Other risk factors for gum disease:

• Smoking (see below)

• Poor diet

• Stress

• 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 may be probably be referred to our in- house 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 our 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 him/ 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!

PERIODONTITIS AND LIFESTYLE

This is the latest advice from the American Academy of Periodontology

How to Reduce Inflammation at Home

Gum disease is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the supporting bone and tissues around the teeth. The inflammatory reaction is your body’s way of removing the toxins released by bacteria that live on your teeth and gums. However, when the inflammation lasts for too long or is too strong, it starts to break down the tissues around your teeth, including your gums and supporting bone. This may cause teeth to become loose and even fall out.

Unfortunately, inflammation doesn’t only occur in your mouth. Several other serious conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis, are caused by the same chronic inflammation that causes periodontal disease.

The good news is that your dental professional can help you reduce the inflammation in your mouth as a result of periodontal disease through treatments such as scaling and root planning. But you can also help to reduce the inflammation in your mouth and even in your entire body right at home.

Here are a few things you can try:

Eat the right foods

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as oily cold-water fish (salmon, tuna, herring, or sardines) and walnuts, have been shown to reduce inflammation. Green tea, which also contains antioxidants, has been shown to reduce the risk of gum disease and cardiovascular disease by reducing inflammation in the body.

Exercise

People who maintain a healthy body weight and exercise regularly have been shown to have lower incidences of periodontal disease than those who do not exercise regularly. Moderate exercise may also help reduce inflammation in your body, but extreme exercise (running a marathon, for example) can actually increase systemic inflammation. It’s a good idea to discuss your exercise plan with a health professional to ensure that it’s a good fit for your lifestyle.

Brush and floss your teeth

When you brush your teeth twice a day and floss at least once a day, you remove the bacteria on your teeth and gums that causes the inflammatory response that leads to gum disease. Therefore, it’s important to take care of your teeth every day by brushing and flossing, and don’t forget to see your dental professional for regular cleanings and check- ups, including a yearly comprehensive periodontal evaluation (CPE).

What are omega-3 fatty acids?

Omega-3 fatty acids are unsaturated fats that our bodies cannot make by themselves. Therefore, omega-3s must come from the things we eat, which is why it’s important to eat a balanced diet. Omega-3s are vital for metabolism and brain function and also help to reduce inflammation in the body. Research has shown that omega-3 fatty acids can help treat or prevent several conditions other than periodontal disease, including cardiovascular disease, asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, depression, and Alzheimer’s disease. However, talk to your health or dental professional before taking omega-3 supplements to make sure they’re right for you.