

Periodontitis - the silent killer!

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What is Periodontitis?

It is the most common oral disease affecting up to 50% of the adult population around the globe. It is inflammation of the supporting structures of our teeth and includes the gum, ligaments holding teeth in position, and the underlying bone. Inflammation is caused by 'bad' bacteria, which invade these structures, causing tissue destruction as they move to deeper levels. In essence, periodontitis is a gradual breakdown of the foundation that supports our teeth. As the foundation becomes compromised, the teeth loosen, and in the advanced stages, it often leads to tooth loss.



Main cause of periodontitis

The leading cause of periodontitis is plaque- a sticky film that forms on everyone's teeth composed mainly of bacteria. If plaque is not removed within 48 hours, it starts to mineralise, forming tartar (calculus). At this stage, it's too late to remove tartar by brushing or flossing. Instead, it needs to be removed by a professional cleaning. The longer plaque and tartar remain on your teeth, the more damage is done. The mildest form of gum disease is gingivitis. If left untreated, it progresses into periodontitis. Eventually, pockets develop between the gum and the teeth that fill with plaque, tartar, and bacteria. In time these pockets deepen, filling with more bacteria. If not treated, these deep infections result in tissue, bone, and ultimately teeth loss.

Does periodontitis lead to other complications?

Periodontitis is an ongoing chronic inflammatory condition that not only puts strain on the immune system but is also linked to other medical conditions. For example, studies have shown a 19% increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease in patients with periodontitis. This risk increases to 44% amongst individuals aged 65 years and older. Periodontitis is also linked to an increased risk of developing medical conditions such as stroke, rheumatoid arthritis, cancers, chronic kidney disease, pre-term birth babies, respiratory disease, and diabetes.

Warning signs and early detection

Periodontitis often goes undetected as in most cases, particularly in the early stages, there are very mild symptoms. Warning signs include bad breath or taste that won't go away, red swollen gums that bleed easily, painful chewing, loose

teeth, gums that have pulled away from the teeth, changes in the way your teeth fit together, and new spaces or gaps developing between your teeth.

Treatment

For those individuals suffering from periodontitis, the good news is, it's never too late to seek treatment. Any dentist or periodontist will first want to classify your gum disease based on the severity to determine the best form of treatment. Treatment varies from a simple deep cleaning to more complex surgical procedures. In addition, studies have shown that it is now possible to eliminate bacterial infection and stimulate bone regrowth with laser therapy.

Prevention is better than cure

Periodontitis may be a common disease, but it is also largely preventable. Follow these easy steps to help maintain healthy gums:

- Brush and floss daily.
- Visit the dentist every six months for a professional cleaning and a laser antibacterial treatment to ensure any bacteria hiding beneath the gum line are eliminated too.
- Eat a diet rich in vitamins C and E and consider adding a probiotic to your diet to help strengthen the “good” bacteria.
- Make use of a fluoride-rich mouth rinse that also contains antimicrobial agents.
- For the smokers out there, it's time to stop. Smoking increases your risk of developing periodontal disease by up to 85%!

The health of your mouth reflects the health of the rest of your body. A healthy mouth equals a healthy body. Periodontitis can be beaten.



Source: Dr Cassandra Webb, Dentist, Intercare Woodburn

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