

# Avoid gum disease\* with these tips



Are you wondering if “a little blood” on your toothbrush is a reason to be concerned? It could indicate the early stages of gum disease, which can lead to serious dental problems later. Almost half of adults over age 30 have gum disease. Plus, 70 percent of people over age 65 have it, too.

The good news is, you can take steps now to prevent it from getting worse. This could save you from tooth loss or gum problems.

## What causes gum disease?

Gum disease (“periodontitis”) happens when plaque—a sticky film of bacteria—builds up on teeth and hardens. At first, this can cause gums that look red, swollen or that bleed (“gingivitis”). As it gets worse, the gums can pull away from the teeth. This can cause infections in the mouth. The infection can lead to bone loss in the mouth and eventually, tooth loss. Gum disease may also be linked to other health problems, including diabetes and heart disease.

## THE STAGES OF GUM DISEASE



## Keep gums healthy

A few tips can help you avoid gum disease and keep your smile feeling and looking great for years to come:

- **Brush twice a day.** Brush with fluoride toothpaste for at least 2 minutes each time and get all surfaces and sides of teeth. Also brush the tongue. Be sure you replace your toothbrush at least every six months, or sooner if it shows signs of wear or fraying.
- **Floss once a day.** Plaque hides between teeth, where the brush can't reach. Remove it each day with floss and you can avoid plaque buildup that hardens and turns to tartar, which can only be removed by a dentist.
- **Don't smoke.** More than 60 percent of smokers have gum disease. This is one of the many reasons quitting is important for your health.
- **See your dentist every six months.** A dentist can remove any plaque or tartar and will check the health of your gums. They can work with you to reverse gum disease in the early stages.
- **Ask about mouthwash.** Some mouthwashes can help reduce plaque and tooth decay. Those at higher risk for gum disease may wish to talk to their dentist about the best options.

If your gums look red or tend to bleed, see your dentist. Early treatment can save your gums and teeth. Even if they are in great shape, regular visits to the dentist will help you keep them that way. Your smile will thank you!

Sources: National Institutes of Health, American Academy of Periodontology