

# Dental cleanings and treatments for gum disease



We'll do whatever it takes and then some.

## What you don't know about gum disease can hurt you

Brushing and flossing are important daily habits that contribute to a healthy smile.

But this daily regimen often isn't enough to prevent gum (periodontal) disease.

This chronic inflammation and infection of the gums and surrounding tissue is the cause of about 70 percent of adult tooth loss, affecting three out of four persons at some point in their lives.

## DENTAL CLEANINGS

Everyone is familiar with a dental cleaning, and most people visit their dentist twice a year to get their teeth cleaned. A dental cleaning typically includes the following procedures:

### Polishing

Dental hygienists use a dental handpiece with a rubber cup filled with polishing compound; this is commonly the finishing stage of other dental hygiene treatments. (Usually children's teeth require only a polish.)

### Prophylaxis

A prophylaxis, sometimes referred to as a prophy, includes scaling and/or polishing to remove plaque, calculus and stain from the visible portion of teeth.

Dental cleanings help prevent gum disease or periodontal disease, a chronic inflammation and infection of the gums and surrounding tissue caused by plaque (bacteria). If plaque isn't removed each day by brushing and flossing, it hardens into a rough, porous substance called calculus (also known as tartar).

Toxins produced and released by bacteria in plaque irritate the gums. These toxins cause the breakdown of the fibers that hold the gums tightly to the teeth,

creating periodontal pockets that fill with even more toxins and bacteria. As the disease progresses, pockets extend deeper and the bacteria moves down until the bone that holds the tooth in place is destroyed. The tooth eventually will fall out or require extraction.

## Fight gum disease with these simple steps



### FLOSS

At least once a day to remove plaque and debris from your teeth.



### BRUSH

For two to three minutes with fluoridated toothpaste at least twice a day.



### RINSE

To reduce plaque up to 20 percent.

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- Simpler process
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## TREATMENTS FOR GUM DISEASE

Once a patient is diagnosed with periodontal disease, dentists will use other treatments. In the early stages of periodontal disease, most treatment involves non-surgical procedures; however, in more advanced stages, surgical procedures are often required. Following are detailed descriptions of these procedures.

### Non-Surgical Procedures

- **Scaling and Root Planing:** While a prophylaxis cleans the visible portion of teeth, scaling and root planing removes plaque and calculus from the periodontal pockets (under the gumline) around the tooth and smoothes the root surfaces to promote healing. A scaling procedure is the only way to remove calculus.
- **Periodontal Maintenance/Periodontal Cleanings/Supportive Periodontal Therapy:** Following periodontal treatment, these specialized cleanings can minimize the recurrence and progression of periodontal disease.

### Surgical Procedures

Sometimes plaque and calculus have reached such advanced stages that dentists must use surgical procedures such as the following:

- **Pocket Depth Reduction Procedures:** Affected gum tissue is elevated and disease-causing bacteria and calculus are removed. Some cases require smoothing the damaged bone to allow the gum tissue to reattach to healthy bone during healing.
- **Regeneration:** The affected gum tissue is treated in the same way as described above, with the additional procedure of using membranes, bone grafts or tissue-stimulating proteins to stimulate the body's natural ability to regenerate healthy bone and gum tissue.
- **Soft Tissue Grafts:** Healthy gum tissue is taken from the palate or other areas of the mouth and is used to repair receding gums and cover exposed root surfaces.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Oral health begins by taking preventive steps to care for your teeth and gums at home. In addition, to help prevent periodontal disease from advancing to the point of requiring surgical procedures, you can:

- Visit your dentist regularly to have your teeth cleaned. This way, your dentist can monitor your oral health and help you identify and prevent problems before they require more comprehensive or expensive treatment. The dentist may suggest more frequent visits, depending on the diagnosis. (Note: Visits more often than twice yearly may not be covered by your dental plan.)
- Ask your dentist to discuss your periodontal health during your regular visit. Children also should be examined for periodontal disease.
- Ask your dentist to design a personalized program of home oral care to meet your needs.
- Contact your dentist immediately if you experience warning signs of gum disease: red, swollen or tender gums; bleeding while brushing or flossing; gums that pull away from teeth; loose or separating teeth; persistent bad breath; changes in the way your teeth or partial dentures fit together when you bite.