Treatment of Gum Disease

***What is gum disease?***

Gum disease can be defined as swelling, soreness or infection of the gums and is one of the most common diseases around the world. Gingivitis and periodontitis are the two main types of gum disease. Gingivitis is an early-stage gum disease where the gums around the teeth become red, swollen and inflamed. If gingivitis is not treated, periodontitis can develop. Periodontitis affects the tissues which support and help to keep teeth in place. There are several types of periodontitis and if left untreated bone loss around teeth can eventually lead to tooth loss.

Gum disease is caused by dental plaque, a thin film of bacteria which forms on the surface of teeth. Several types of bacteria negatively impact the health of the gums. If plaque is not removed through tooth brushing or interproximal cleaning (in between teeth) plaque accumulates and damages the gums.

Gum disease can affect anyone, however, some people are more predisposed to aggressive forms of the disease. Factors which can increase the susceptibility of severe gum disease include smoking, diabetes, poor diet, stress, certain medications and obesity.

***What are the signs and symptoms of gum disease?***

Most people are unaware that they have gum disease as it is often painless. It is therefore essential that you visit the dentist regularly as they are able to readily identify early symptoms of gum disease. In the early stages of gum disease, gums may appear red and bleed whilst brushing. This is called gingivitis. If left untreated periodontitis develops and this affects the gums, bone and other supporting tissues of the teeth. Signs and symptoms of periodontitis include:

* Bad breath (halitosis)
* Spaces between teeth
* Shrinking (receding) gums
* Bad taste
* Collection of pus (gum abscess)
* Loose teeth
* Loss of teeth

Please make sure you tell your dentist about any medical conditions as it may change the way your dentist manages your gum disease.

***What happens if I have gum disease?***

Treatment will focus on removing plaque from around your teeth and your dentist will advise you how this can best be achieved. Your dentist will teach you specific oral hygiene methods to control bacteria that collect on your teeth. Gum treatment will only succeed if good oral hygiene practices are carried out at home.

Your dentist may advise you to have professional cleaning of your teeth such as a scale and polish or root planning. Dentists, hygienists and therapists are able to provide both scale and polishes and root planning.

A scale and polish involves the removal of plaque and calculus (tartar) that can build up on your teeth.

Root planning may need to be carried out if you have bacteria under your gum line on the roots of your teeth. This is sometimes referred to as a ‘deep clean,’ and patients may require a local anaesthetic to numb the area prior to treatment.

Occasionally, if you have severe gum disease, more complex treatments are required and your dentist will advise you accordingly.

***What are the risks of gum treatment?***

***Is there anything I can do to prevent gum disease?***

It is important to visit the dentist regularly as gum disease is completely treatable if diagnosed early enough. Maintaining good oral hygiene practices at home is essential to prevent gum disease. You should brush twice a day and clean between your teeth as this is where most gum disease starts. You can achieve this through interdental brushes or floss. If you have any concerns you should speak to your dentist as they will show you how to clean your teeth effectively.

***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.