



Penn Dental
Family Practice



“Do I have Gum Disease?”

Use this Self-Assessment to Find Out!

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Understanding Periodontal Disease

More commonly known as gum disease, periodontal disease is an oral condition in which the gums and deeper periodontal structures become inflamed by bacteria. To understand gum disease, it's helpful to visualize what's happening on a microbial level.

While our body is home to many “good” bacteria that keep us healthy, there are two types of destructive bacteria that negatively affect our teeth and gums: *Streptococcus mutans* and *Streptococcus sobrinus*. These bacteria live off the remnants of foods containing simple sugars. As they feed on simple sugars, they multiply, forming bacterial colonies called dental plaque.

Plaque accumulates when teeth are not cleaned regularly through brushing, flossing, and professional dental cleanings. Your immune system responds to the plaque as a foreign invader, and activates your immune system as a self-protection mechanism. Over time, chronic inflammation causes premature aging and systemic disease. Research shows that gum disease is associated with a number of systemic diseases, including diabetes and heart disease.

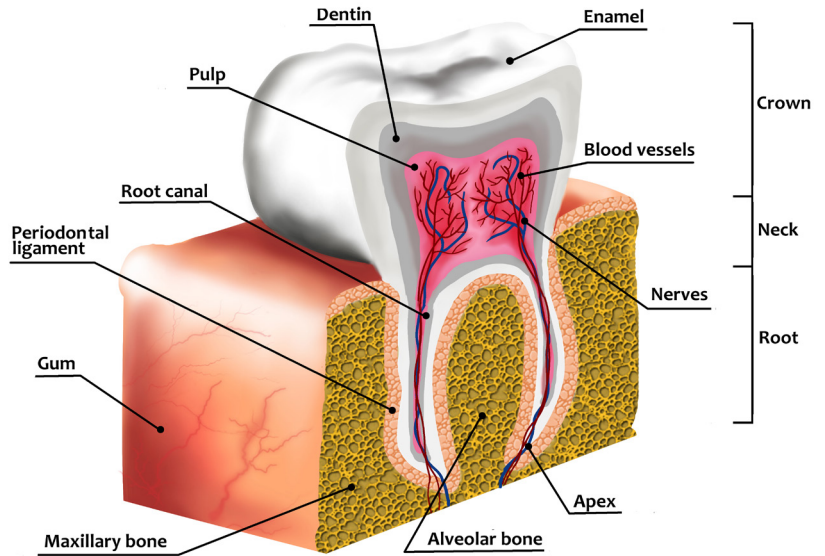
Periodontal disease can establish itself when the gums detach from the teeth as a result of the body's inflammatory response to plaque. This inflammatory process is responsible for the loss of periodontal tissue, pocket formation in the gums, and the loosening and subsequent loss of teeth.

Periodontitis is the #1 cause of tooth loss. According to the Center for Diseases Prevention and Control, as many as 47% of Americans have gum disease at varying levels of severity. This self-assessment is designed to help you determine whether you have gum disease, and if so, how serious it may be. Even mild cases of gum disease require intervention so that they do not progress further.



Self-Assessment: Do I have gum disease?

This self-assessment includes questions with point values assigned according to the severity of the symptoms: mild, moderate, and severe. Anytime you answer yes, add the indicated point value to your overall score. Every no receives 0 points. This test is not intended as a medical diagnosis; if you are concerned about periodontitis, please contact your dentist for an appointment.



- ☐ Do your gums bleed when you floss or brush your teeth? 1
- ☐ Have you had bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth on a regular basis? 1
- ☐ Do you see pus when you press on your gums? 3
- ☐ Do your teeth appear longer than they were before? 2
- ☐ Do you experience hot/cold sensitivity more often than in the past? 2
- ☐ Are your gums red and tender? 2
- ☐ Can you wiggle one or more teeth with your tongue or finger? 3
- ☐ Do you see spaces between your teeth where there weren't any before? 3
- ☐ Do you often have a dry or burning sensation in your mouth? 1
- ☐ Have parts of your gum pulled away from the tooth, forming deep pockets? 3



Self-Assessment Scoring

Please note that these scores are approximations and do not carry the weight of a dentist's diagnosis.

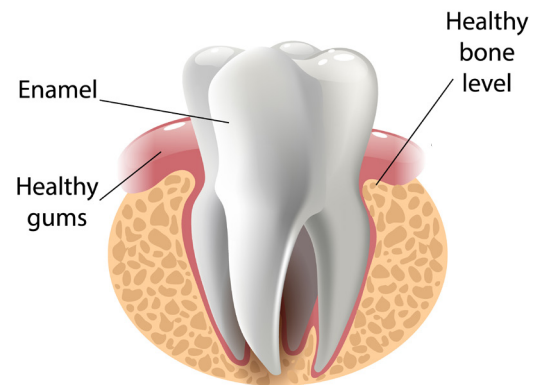
If you scored a 1 or 2, then it is likely that you are experiencing a gum sensitivity at this time. If symptoms persist, then you most likely have a mild form of gum disease (see gingivitis, below), and should seek dental attention.

1-7: Mild (Gingivitis)

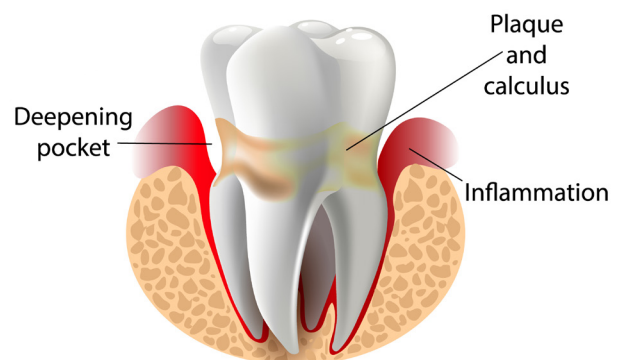
When plaque forms on the teeth and is not removed within the first 48 hours, it starts to harden into tartar. Once it has calcified into tartar, it becomes impossible to scrape off with a toothbrush or floss. Only a dental cleaning can do the job. As the first stage of gum disease, gingivitis (literally meaning “inflammation of the gums”) is typically characterized by symptoms such as bleeding gums, tenderness, dry mouth or bad breath, and with time, gum recession.

Your dentist can determine, based on the severity of your symptoms, what level of treatment is called for. Often, a professional cleaning procedure called scaling and root planing, combined with good oral hygiene, is sufficient for recovery. Scaling and root planing remove the plaque that has accumulated on the tooth crown (the part that shows), the root, and slightly below the gum line, all while smoothing the roots of the tooth so that bacteria can't gather on those surfaces as easily. You may also be prescribed an antibacterial toothpaste and mouthwash for use at home.

Normal tooth



Periodontitis



8-14: Moderate Periodontitis

If you scored between 8 and 14, then you may have a periodontitis that has progressed from gingivitis, but which has not yet inflicted irreparable damage on your periodontal/dental structures. However, even a moderate level indicates that the disease is already beginning to negatively impact your gums and periodontal ligament. Besides gum recession, you may also start seeing the gums pull away from the teeth, forming pockets where infections can develop. If puss emerges when you press on your gums, that is a sign of an infection and you need treatment urgently.

Moderate periodontitis may require more than scaling and root planing, though typically your dentist will start there. If that procedure does not resolve the problem, you may be recommended certain surgical treatments. Periodontal surgeries can accomplish a variety of aims, such as re-shaping the gums that have pulled away to fit the teeth again, or fostering bone growth in the jaw.

15-20 Advanced Periodontitis

If you scored 15-20, then that means you answered all or almost all self-assessment questions in the affirmative. Only 10-15% of people who have gingivitis will go on to develop a more advanced periodontal disease. People with advanced periodontitis have experienced inflammation for a long enough time that the gums have substantially pulled away from the teeth, creating pockets between 4 and 6 millimeters deep. Bacteria accumulate and multiply at these sites, resulting in infection. Antibiotics are often used to treat such gum infections.

Advanced periodontitis may also lead to a denigration of the jaw bone, which can be very dangerous to the patient. If you are diagnosed with advanced periodontitis, then it is likely that you will need surgery either now or down the road. Close supervision by a periodontist is essential to halt the disease's progression and protect against resurgence.



What Next?

If you're experiencing many of these symptoms, the most important thing to realize is that you may have some form of periodontitis, and you should make an appointment with a specialized dentist. A periodontist specializes in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of periodontal disease. While general dentists can address mild symptoms of gum disease, a periodontist has expertise in the more advanced cases.

At Penn Dental Family Practice, you benefit from a variety of specialists all under one roof. Our system ensures continuity of care and coordination between dentists. We encourage you to make an appointment if you suspect you may already have or are developing gum disease. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"! Nothing could be truer about periodontitis, which is harder to recover from as it progresses. Take care of yourself today, and you'll thank yourself tomorrow!

To make an appointment at PDFP, please call at 215-898-PDFP.

