

Periodontal Disease in Children and Adolescents

Periodontal disease is often thought of as a consequence of aging, or an adult problem. But, did you know that gingivitis, a mild form of periodontitis, is often found in both children and adolescents? Additionally, research shows that more advanced, harmful forms of the disease can occur in younger age groups. The good news is that a little education and a few easy steps go a long way toward preventing periodontal disease.

There are three types of periodontal disease that are commonly found in children and adolescents. The first type is chronic gingivitis, which usually causes gum tissue to swell, turn red, and bleed easily. Left untreated, chronic gingivitis can eventually lead to more serious forms of periodontal disease. The second type of periodontal disease is chronic and aggressive periodontitis, which mainly affects the first molars and incisors. These forms of periodontitis are characterized by bone loss and, interestingly, patients usually form very little dental plaque. The third type of periodontal disease is generalized chronic or aggressive periodontitis, which is similar to chronic or aggressive periodontitis, except that it involves the entire mouth. Patients with the generalized form have heavy accumulations of plaque, calculus, and inflammation of the gums. Eventually, these forms of periodontitis can cause the teeth to become loose, and possibly to fall out.

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM or visit perio.org for more information on periodontal disease.

Early diagnosis ensures the greatest chance for successful treatment, so it is important that children receive a periodontal examination as part of their routine dental visits. The following are some tips to ensure your child will benefit from a lifetime of healthy smiles:

- Establish a home and professional care routine. Reward your child or adolescent not just when a tooth is lost, but also when he or she receives a clean bill of health from the dentist.
- Check your young child's mouth for any signs of periodontitis, including bleeding while brushing teeth, swollen and bright red gums, gum recession, and bad breath. Your dentist should be notified immediately if your child exhibits any of these symptoms.
- Tell your dental professional about any medication your child or adolescent is taking, as some medications can dry out the mouth and pose other threats to oral health.
- Monitor your children for teeth grinding, a harmful habit which can increase the risk of developing periodontal diseases.

Healthy teeth and gums, happy smiles, and fresh breath can go a long way toward a young person's sense of personal appearance, confidence, and self-esteem. Give your child these precious gifts, which are easily achieved through lifelong habits of brushing and flossing and regular professional dental care.



Healthy Gums Start at Home

Along with twice yearly visits to a dental professional, the key to good oral health is an at-home oral care routine consisting of brushing and flossing. Diligent at-home oral care is especially important for children who have braces or other orthodontic appliances.

Flossing

Although it is most important to start flossing your child's teeth when the gaps between them close, it is a good idea to establish the habit with your child even if there are spaces between the teeth. This way, the child will have more success in completing daily flossing when it becomes necessary.

Brushing

Establish a set sequence for brushing your child's teeth so the process becomes a routine for both of you.