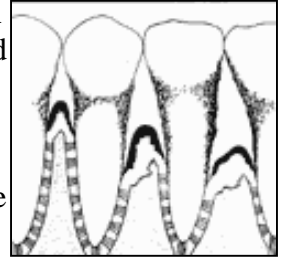




Long Beach Island Health Department

Gum (Periodontal) Diseases

Periodontal disease is an infection of the tissues that support your teeth. A shallow v-shaped crevice, called a *sulcus*, is located between the tooth and gums. Periodontal diseases attack just below the gum line in the sulcus, where they cause the attachment of the tooth and its supporting tissues to break down. As the tissues are damaged, the sulcus develops into a pocket. Generally, the more severe the disease, the greater the depth of the pocket.



Periodontal diseases are classified according to the severity of the disease. The two major stages are *gingivitis* and *periodontitis*. Gingivitis only affects the gums and is reversible, but may lead to the more serious, destructive periodontitis.

Factors that increase the risk of developing periodontal disease:

- Tobacco smoking or chewing
- Systemic diseases such as diabetes
- Medications such as steroids, anti-epilepsy drugs, cancer therapy drugs, calcium channel blockers
- Crooked teeth, bridges that no longer fit properly, or defective fillings
- Pregnancy or use of oral contraceptives

Warning signs that can signal a problem:

- Gums that bleed easily, have pulled away from the teeth or are red, swollen, and tender
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste
- Permanent teeth that are loose or separating
- Any change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Any change in the fit of partial dentures

It is possible to have periodontal disease and have no warning signs. That is why regular dental checkups are important. Treatment methods depend upon the type of disease and how far the condition has progressed. Good oral hygiene (brushing, flossing and a balanced diet) can help prevent tooth loss from periodontal disease.

Adapted from the American Dental Association