

Checking for Periodontal Diseases

During your dental checkup, the dentist examines your gums. This is called a periodontal examination. A periodontal probe is gently used to measure the depth of the sulcus surrounding each tooth. The depth of the healthy sulcus is usually three millimeters or less. The periodontal probe can indicate whether you have developed any pockets and the depth of those pockets. Generally, the more severe the disease, the deeper the pocket.

Dental X-rays also may be taken to evaluate the amount of bone supporting the teeth and to detect other problems not visible during the clinical examination. If periodontal disease is diagnosed, the dentist may provide treatment or may refer you to a periodontist, a dentist who specializes in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of periodontal diseases.



Periodontal probe of a healthy sulcus

Periodontal probe in a deep pocket



Radiograph showing supporting bone.



Radiograph showing periodontal bone loss.

How can I prevent periodontal diseases?

A good oral hygiene routine practiced for a few minutes twice a day can help reduce your risk of developing periodontal diseases and tooth decay. When choosing dental care products, look for those that display the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. The Seal of Acceptance is your assurance the product meets the ADA's criteria for safety and effectiveness for its intended use.



- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. With thorough brushing, you can remove plaque from the inner, outer and chewing surfaces of each tooth. Your dentist or dental hygienist can show you a proper brushing technique.
- Clean between teeth once a day with dental floss or another interdental cleaner to remove plaque and debris from areas your toothbrush can't reach.
- If you need extra help controlling gingivitis and plaque that forms above the gum line, your dentist may recommend using an ADA-accepted antimicrobial mouthrinse or other oral hygiene aids as an effective addition to your daily oral hygiene routine.
- Eat a balanced diet for good general health and limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly. Professional cleanings are the only way to remove tartar, which traps bacteria along the gum line.

Treating Periodontal Diseases

Periodontal treatment methods depend upon the type and severity of the disease. If the disease is caught very early (when it is gingivitis), and no damage has been done, you may simply be given instructions on improving your daily oral hygiene.

Even with these measures, some patients develop more severe periodontal disease that must be treated. The first step usually involves a special cleaning, called scaling and root planing. This procedure removes plaque and tartar deposits on the tooth and root surfaces. This helps gum tissue to heal and pockets to shrink, which makes it more difficult for plaque to accumulate along the root surfaces. This is sometimes referred to as "periodontal" or "deep cleaning" and may take more than one visit.

A local anesthetic may be given to reduce any discomfort. Using an instrument called a small scaler or an ultrasonic cleaner, plaque and tartar are carefully removed down to the bottom of each periodontal pocket. The tooth's root surfaces are then smoothed or planed.

Your dentist also may recommend medications to help control infection and pain, or to aid healing. These medications could include a pill, a mouthrinse, or a substance that the dentist places directly in the periodontal pocket after scaling and root planing. Your dentist may also stress the need to control any related systemic disease, like diabetes.

ADA American
Dental
Association®

America's leading
advocate for oral health

Produced with the cooperation of the
American Academy of Periodontology

W121

To order additional copies, call 1-800-947-4746
or visit www.adacatalog.org