DENTAL ABSCESS

A dental abscess is a painful swelling filled with a thick fluid that is yellow in color (pus). There are two types of dental abscess, a gum abscess (also known as a periodontal abscess) and a tooth abscess (also known as a periapical abscess).

What causes a dental abscess?

Abscesses can form when the inside of your mouth is irritated and bacteria enters, causing an infection. The abscess forms around this infection as a barrier, stopping the infection from spreading.

A gum abscess is usually caused by an infection between the tooth and gum. This may occur as a result of food getting trapped or, in cases of severe periodontal disease, when bacteria build up under the gum and in the bone.

A tooth abscess appears at the tip of the tooth's root and occurs when a tooth's nerve is dead or dying.

Dental abscess symptoms

Dental abscess symptoms include:

- a throbbing pain
- a swelling filled with pus
- inflammation of the gums
- teeth that are sensitive to pressure

- a foul taste in the mouth (caused when the pus drains)

It is important not to ignore tooth or gum abscess symptoms, as the infection can last months or years and will not go away without treatment. Left untreated, the infection can cause damage to the teeth and bone surrounding it, and can also progress to the bloodstream, causing more serious complications.

Dental abscess treatment

If you think you have a tooth or gum abscess you should make an appointment with a dental professional.

Your dentist will clean the area around the abscess, perform abscess drainage to release trapped pus and treat the infection. Sometimes, a fistula develops in the mouth through bone and skin to allow pus to drain. If this hollow tunnel has developed as a result of your abscess, your dentist will clean this, allowing it to close up on its own.

When an infection has started inside the tooth, your dentist will need to make a small hole in the tooth. This allows the tooth abscess to drain. Root canal treatment and a filling or crown will be required following this procedure.

In cases where the abscess has caused damage to the tooth or is particularly large, you may need to have the tooth removed.

If your dental abscess is caused by periodontal disease, the disease will need to be treated to prevent further infection. However, your dentist can drain the abscess to alleviate pain.

How to prevent a dental abscess

Abscesses can be prevented by maintaining good dental health. This includes daily brushing and flossing as well as regular checkups with a dental professional.