GUM DISEASE

What is Gum Disease?

Gum disease, or periodontisis, is a periodontal disease that starts with bacterial growth within the mouth and can end up destroying the tissue, leading to loose teeth and eventually tooth loss if not correctly treated.

What are the causes of Gum Disease?

To begin, the bacteria contained within plaque build-up causes the gums to become inflamed and sensitive. It's at this point where it's common that the gums will bleed during tooth brushing. This is one of the earliest signs of gum disease. At this point there is no permanent damage done but if left untreated, it can advance to periodontisis.

During this stage, the inner layer of the gums pulls back from the teeth and exposes gaps which can fill with debris and become infected. The body's natural immune response battles these infections and causes the degradation of the bone and tissue that anchors the teeth in place. Eventually this leads to loose teeth and tooth loss.

Gum disease causes include:

- Poor oral hygiene habits
- Illness (such as cancer, HIV or diabetes)
- Smoking
- Genetics
- Medication
- Hormonal changes due to menstruation, pregnancy or the menopause

Gum Disease Symptoms

Some of the symptoms of gum disease include:

- Bleeding gums
- Tender, red or swollen gums
- Ongoing bad breath or foul taste in the mouth
- Deep pockets between the teeth
- Loose teeth

As with all dental problems, it's vital not to ignore the early signs of gum disease. Your dentist will be able to identify the symptoms of gum disease and propose an effective treatment.

Gum Disease Treatment

The treatment of gum disease is focused on encouraging the teeth to reattach to the gums, to reduce the size of the gaps between teeth, the swelling, the risk of infection and to prevent the condition from spreading. Specific treatments for gum disease can range from cleaning by a hygienist to scaling and root planing to remove plaque and tartar from both above and below the gum line. This removes all the bacteria and provides a clean surface for the gums to reattach to.

Advance signs of gum disease may require surgical treatment that can include flap surgery (a more in depth version of planing and scaling) to bone and soft tissue grafts to encourage bone and tissue regrowth, respectively, and guided tissue or bone regeneration. This is often required when the loose tooth is at risk of falling out. Finally, antibiotics can be used to treat gum disease as well.

How to prevent Gum Disease

The best way to prevent gum disease is to follow a good oral hygiene routine that includes brushing and flossing at least twice a day. Antimicrobial toothpaste alongside a suitable mouthwash will also help to remove any bacteria that may be present.

Regular visits to your hygienist as part of your dental check-up are also an important part of preventing gum disease.