

Periodontal Health in Children and Adolescents

Periodontitis is thought of as an adult problem as the result of aging. 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 periodontal disease can occur in these younger age groups. The good news a few easy steps can help prevent periodontal diseases.

There are three types of periodontal diseases found in children and adolescents.

1. **Chronic gingivitis** causes gum tissue to swell, turn red and bleed easily. Left untreated, chronic gingivitis can eventually lead to more serious forms of periodontal disease.
2. **Aggressive periodontitis** affects the first molars and incisors. It can include bone loss and patients may form very little dental plaque.
3. **Generalized aggressive periodontitis** involves the entire mouth. Patients have heavy accumulations of plaque, calculus and inflammation of the gums.

Eventually, periodontitis can cause the teeth to become loose and possibly to fall out.

For your teen, hormonal changes due to puberty can put them at risk for periodontal disease. During puberty, an increased level of hormones, such as progesterone and possibly estrogen, cause increased blood circulation to the gums. This may increase the gum's sensitivity and lead to a greater reaction to any irritation, including food particles and plaque. During this time, the gums may become swollen, turn red and feel tender.

As your teen gets older, the tendency for the gums to swell in response to irritants will lessen. However, during

puberty, it is very important to follow a good dental hygiene regimen, including regular brushing and flossing, and regular dental visits. In some cases, a dental professional may recommend periodontal therapy to help prevent damage to the tissues and bone surrounding the teeth.

Early diagnosis is important for successful treatment of periodontal diseases. Therefore, it is important that children and teens receive a comprehensive periodontal examination as part of their routine dental visits.

The most important preventive step against periodontal disease is to establish good oral health habits with your child. There are basic preventive steps to help your child maintain good oral health:

- Establish good dental hygiene habits early. When your child is 12 months old, you can begin using toothpaste when brushing his or her teeth. When the gaps between your child's teeth close, it's important to start flossing.
- Set an example. Serve as a good role model by practicing good dental hygiene habits yourself.
- Make time. Schedule regular dental visits for family checkups, periodontal evaluations and cleanings bi-annually.
- Check your child's mouth for the signs of periodontal disease. Symptoms of gum disease include bleeding gums, swollen and bright red gums, gums that are receding away from the teeth and bad breath.
- Early diagnosis ensures the greatest change for successful treatment. It is important that children receive a periodontal examination as part of their routine dental visits



Healthy Gums Tips

The key to good oral health is an at-home routine consisting of brushing and flossing and seeing your dental professional twice a year for a check-up. Get them in the habit of flossing even when there are spaces between the teeth. It becomes necessary when the gaps begin to close, but getting the routine down before is helpful. Brush your teeth together in the morning and before bed so the process becomes a routine for both of you.

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