What is *gum disease?*

Gum disease is the common name for 'periodontitis'.

Gum disease is caused by **plaque**. Plaque is a soft, sticky, yellow film made up of bacteria and food debris that forms on our teeth and gums after we eat.

Broadly speaking, there are two forms of gum disease, **gingivitis and periodontitis.**

Gingivitis

Gingivitis is the mildest form of gum disease and means inflammation or swelling of the gums.

Basically, if every little bit of plaque isn't removed by thorough tooth brushing and flossing, the bits left behind will build up, sit on the gums and irritate until the gums swell. Then the gums start to bleed.

This is gingivitis. Gingivitis can be reversed.

Figure 1. https://www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/gingivitis#/media/File:Gingivitis-before-and-after-3.jpg

If you have gingivitis, you may notice red, puffy and tender gums that bleed when you brush your teeth and use dental floss.

Gingivitis sets up periodontitis by weakening the gums.

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Over time, if plaque is still not removed, and you are prone to periodontitis, bacteria living in plaque start to attack the seal between your gums and teeth, breaking down gum tissue and bone.

When gum and bone is being destroyed, you have periodontitis.

Periodontitis

Periodontitis can affect any age group but is most common in adults. Not everyone will develop periodontitis.

For people who do get periodontitis, they usually have relatives who have periodontitis, or a medical condition such as diabetes, or they smoke/ vape.

This is severe periodontitis. Periodontitis needs treatment.

Figure 2 Periodontitis case photos. A/P. M. Newnham

Severe periodontitis causes teeth to drift out of place, forming gaps, become loose and eventually they can fall out.

Periodontitis rarely causes pain.

If you have periodontitis, you may notice:
- red, bleeding gums
- bad breath/ taste
- receding gums
- loose teeth.

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