

The Silent Killer

by Scott F. Kenward, DMD

Surprising but true: the major cause of tooth loss in adults is not decay – it's periodontal (gum) disease. And it's completely painless right up to an advanced stage.

More than half of all people over age 18 have at least the early stage of periodontal disease. After age 35 about three out of four adults are affected.

Some people seem to be more susceptible to gum disease than others. Anything from pregnancy, systemic disease (like diabetes) and certain medications can contribute to its development. Smoking increases the likelihood dramatically (and renders treatment less effective).

Some unlucky folks are inherently more susceptible because of unique bacterial and chemical mixes in the mouth that encourage plaque.

The results of gum disease aren't pretty. Early stages show up as persistent bad breath and red, swollen gums. Eventually tooth loss is inevitable.

But there is good news. Once you've been diagnosed, your dentist can start you on a treatment program that involves mechanical removal of plaque and smoothing the root surface of teeth so gum tissue has a chance to reattach. As co-therapist, your dentist will depend on you to continue the work at home. It's critical to the success of your treatment that you:

- 1) Brush and floss twice a day.
- 2) Come in regularly. Only a hygienist can get your teeth their cleanest.
- 3) Maintain a healthy diet.

Periodontal disease can be treated at every stage. If you notice any signs of gum problems, do call your dentist for a periodontal exam. Together you can beat the statistics and have a good chance of never having to wear dentures.

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Danger Signs of Gum Disease

Periodontal disease is painless in its early stages. So how can you tell if it's in your future? Take a good look at your gums. Then call us.

- Do your gums bleed – at all – when you brush?
- Are your gums swollen, red and tender?
- Have any permanent teeth loosened?
- Are you distressed by persistent bad breath?
- Are your gums pulling away from your teeth?
- Do your teeth fit together differently when you bite?