

Is it Time to See a Periodontist?

If you have been experiencing symptoms of periodontal disease, including red, swollen or tender gums or other pain in your mouth, bleeding while brushing your teeth, persistent bad breath, or a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite, it may be a good idea to schedule an appointment with a periodontist. However, you may be wondering "What exactly is periodontal disease?" and "Why is it a good idea to see a periodontist for treatment options?" These are common questions, and their answers are important!

The word "periodontal" refers to the gum tissue and bone around the teeth. Periodontal disease, also known as gum disease, is caused by the chronic inflammatory response to bacteria under the gums and around the teeth. The bacteria irritate the gums and generate an inflammatory response which over time can break down and destroy the gums and bone that support the teeth. When periodontal disease is left untreated, it is one of the primary causes of adult tooth loss. Also, several research studies have found a relationship between periodontal disease and other serious health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis.

A periodontist is a dentist who specializes in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of periodontal disease and other procedures involving the gums and

bone around the teeth, such as the placement of dental implants. Periodontists are also dentistry's experts in the treatment of oral inflammation. Periodontists receive extensive training in these areas, including three additional years of education beyond dental school. The extra education and wide-ranging experience treating gum disease and inflammation assures that you are receiving the best possible care. Periodontists are also familiar with the latest techniques for diagnosing and treating periodontal disease. In addition, they can perform cosmetic periodontal procedures to help you achieve the smile you desire.

During your first visit, your periodontist will review your complete medical and dental history with you. It is very important for your periodontist to know if you are taking any medications or are being treated for any other health condition, as it may affect your periodontal care. Your gums will be examined to see if there is any gum line recession, and your teeth will be checked to see how they fit together when you bite. Your periodontist will also take a small measuring instrument and place it between your teeth and gums to determine the depth of your pockets. X-rays may also be taken to observe the health of the bone below your gums. If treatment is needed, your periodontist will discuss the course of action with you.



What if I don't have any symptoms of periodontal disease?

The first stage of gum disease, gingivitis, is often accompanied by little or no discomfort. Sometimes, the only way to detect periodontal disease is through a comprehensive periodontal evaluation!

Additionally, there are many risk factors that may increase your chances of having periodontal disease. Even if you think you don't have any symptoms of periodontal disease, you may want to see a periodontist if any of these risk factors apply to you: tobacco use, diabetes, heart disease, or family history of periodontal disease. To determine your risk, take the AAP's Risk Assessment Test, which can be found at perio.org.

If you're not ready to see a periodontist, remember to brush your teeth twice every day, floss once every day, and see your dental professional every 6 months for a check-up and cleaning. It is very important to take care of your teeth even if you don't have periodontal disease!

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The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM or visit perio.org for more information on periodontal disease.