

# Overview

## Gum disease (gingivitis and periodontitis)

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Gum disease is a very common condition where the gums become swollen, sore or infected.

Most adults in Ireland have gum disease to some degree, and most people experience it at least once. It's much less common in children.

If you have gum disease, your gums may bleed when you brush your teeth and you may have bad breath. This early stage of gum disease is known as gingivitis.

If gingivitis is not treated, a condition called periodontitis can develop. This affects the tissues that support teeth and hold them in place.

If periodontitis is not treated, the bone in your jaw may be damaged. This may lead to small spaces opening up between the gum and teeth.

Your teeth can become loose and may eventually fall out.

## Causes of gum disease

Gum disease is caused by a build-up of plaque on the teeth. Plaque is a sticky substance that contains bacteria.

Some bacteria in plaque are harmless, but some are harmful for the health of your gums.

If you do not remove plaque from your teeth by brushing them, it builds up and irritates your gums. This can lead to redness with bleeding, swelling and soreness.

Read more about the [causes of gum disease](#)

## Seeing your dentist

Make an appointment to see your dentist if your gums are painful, swollen, or bleed when you brush your teeth.

Your dentist can carry out a thorough dental examination to check the health of your gums. This may involve inserting a thin metal stick with a bend in one end (periodontal probe) beside your teeth.

In some cases, x-rays may be needed to check the condition of your teeth and jaw bone.

## Preventing and treating gum disease

Mild cases of gum disease can usually be treated by maintaining a good level of oral hygiene.

This includes brushing your teeth at least twice a day and flossing regularly.

You should also make sure you go for regular dental check-ups.

Your dentist or dental hygienist will clean your teeth and remove any hardened plaque (tartar).

They'll also be able to show you how to clean your teeth effectively. This will help prevent plaque building up in the future.

If you have severe gum disease, you'll usually need to have further medical and dental treatment.

In some cases, surgery may need to be carried out. This will usually be performed by a specialist in gum problems (periodontics).

Read more about [treatment for gum disease](#)

## Dental check-ups

It's important to have regular dental check-ups. This is so any problems with your teeth and gums can be detected and treated early.

If you have never had gum disease and have good oral health, you may only need to visit your dentist every 1 to 2 years for a check-up.

You may need to visit your dentist more frequently if you have had problems with gum disease in the past. At each appointment your dentist will tell you when you need your next appointment.

If you have an increased risk of developing gum problems you may need regular dental checks.

## Complications of gum disease

Untreated gum disease that develops into periodontitis can lead to further complications.

These include:

- painful collections of pus (gum abscesses)
- receding gums

- loose teeth
- loss of teeth

Read more about [complications of gum disease](#)

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Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Page last reviewed: 23 March 2021

Next review due: 23 March 2024

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

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