

## Causes of Gum Disease

**Periodontal (gum) diseases, including gingivitis and periodontitis, are serious infections that, left untreated, can lead to tooth loss. Periodontal disease can affect one tooth or many teeth. The main cause of periodontal disease is bacterial plaque, a sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth. However, factors like the following also affect the health of your gums.**

### Smoking

As you probably already know, tobacco use is linked with many serious illnesses such as cancer, lung disease and heart disease, as well as numerous other health problems. What you may not know is that tobacco users also are at increased risk for periodontal disease. In fact, recent studies have shown that tobacco use may be one of the most significant risk factors in the development and progression of periodontal disease.

[Smoking and Periodontal Disease](#)

[Research on the Oral Health Effects of Smoking](#)



### Genetics

Research proves that up to 30% of the population may be genetically susceptible to gum disease. Despite aggressive oral care habits, these people may be six times more likely to develop periodontal disease. Identifying these people with a genetic test before they even show signs of the disease and getting them into early interventive treatment may help them keep their teeth for a lifetime.

### Puberty, Pregnancy and Menopause in Women

A woman's health needs are unique. Though brushing and flossing daily, a healthy diet, and regular exercise are important for oral health throughout life, there are certain times in a woman's life when extra care is needed—times when you mature and change such as puberty or menopause, and times when you have special health needs, such as menstruation or pregnancy. During these particular times, a woman's body experiences hormonal changes that can affect many of the tissues in your body, including the gums. Your gums can become sensitive, and at times react strongly to the hormonal fluctuations. This may make you more susceptible to gum disease. Additionally, recent studies suggest that pregnant women with gum disease may be more likely to deliver preterm, low birthweight babies.

[Periodontal Diseases Should Concern Women of All Ages](#)

[Women and Periodontal Disease](#)

[Research on Periodontal Disease During Pregnancy](#)

### Stress

As you probably already know, stress is linked to many serious conditions such as hypertension, cancer, and numerous other health problems. What you may not know is that stress also is a risk factor for periodontal disease. Research demonstrates that stress can make it more difficult for the body to fight off infection, including periodontal diseases.

[Stress May Leave Your Mouth a Mess](#)

Information from the  
**March 2010**  
**Patient Page** from  
the American  
Academy of  
Periodontology



**Questions?**  
Visit [perio.org](http://perio.org)!

If you or someone you know is considering treatment for periodontal disease, do some research on the procedure or treatment. Perio.org has information about the latest research and treatment options available. You may also want to talk to friends or relatives who have had periodontal treatment about their experiences. By learning about different treatment plans, you will be prepared to discuss your options with your periodontist.

*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. Visit [perio.org](http://perio.org) to assess your risk and for more information on periodontal disease.*

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### Medications

Some drugs, such as oral contraceptives, anti-depressants, and certain heart medicines, can affect your oral health. Just as you notify your pharmacist and other health care providers of all medicines you are taking and any changes in your overall health, you should also inform your dental care provider.

### Clenching or Grinding Your Teeth

Has anyone ever told you that you grind your teeth at night? Is your jaw sore from clenching your teeth when you're taking a test or solving a problem at work? Clenching or grinding your teeth can put excess force on the supporting tissues of the teeth and could speed up the rate at which these periodontal tissues are destroyed.



### Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease that causes altered levels of sugar in the blood. Diabetes develops from either a deficiency in insulin production (a hormone that is the key component in the body's ability to use blood sugars) or the body's inability to use insulin correctly. According to the American Diabetes Association, approximately 16 million Americans have diabetes; however, more than half have not been diagnosed with this disease. If you are diabetic, you are at higher risk for developing infections, including periodontal diseases. These infections can impair the ability to process and/

or utilize insulin, which may cause your diabetes to be more difficult to control and your infection to be more severe than a non-diabetic.

[Research on the Links Between Diabetes and Periodontal Disease](#)

[Diabetes: The Mouth-Body Connection](#)

### Other Systemic Diseases

Diseases that interfere with the body's immune system may worsen the condition of the gums.

[The Mouth Body Connection](#)

[Research on Heart Disease and Periodontal Disease](#)

### Poor Nutrition and Obesity

As you may already know, a diet low in important nutrients can compromise the body's immune system and make it harder for the body to fight off infection. Because periodontal disease is a serious infection, poor nutrition can worsen the condition of your gums.

[Want Healthy Gums? Hit the Dairy Aisle](#)

[Calcium Important for Nursing Mothers' Oral Health](#)

### Find Out More

[Causes and Types of Periodontal Disease](#)

[Periodontal Disease Risk Assessment Test](#)

[What to Expect in a Comprehensive Periodontal Evaluation](#)

[Find a Periodontist Near You](#)

[Treatments for Periodontal Disease](#)

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