



# Looking after my gums

## Information for patients

This information sheet answers some of the questions you may have about bleeding gums and gum disease. It explains what to do if you find your gums are bleeding and how to keep your gums healthy. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the dental team caring for you.

### What is gum disease?

Gum disease is where the gums become inflamed where the tooth and gum line meet. This can also be called gingivitis (bleeding, swollen gums). Gum disease can be painless, so it is important to be aware of what to look out for (signs and symptoms). If gum disease is left untreated, bone loss (periodontitis) around the tooth may occur, which can lead to tooth loss.

### What causes gum disease?

Plaque is a colourless sticky layer containing bacteria that is always forming on your teeth. If this is not removed it can lead to gum disease. Calculus (hardened plaque) can build up if the plaque is not removed daily. Limiting your intake of tobacco (smoking or chewing) and alcohol can help keep your gums healthy.

### Why is it important to look after my gums?

Healthy gums prevent dental problems including gum disease or tooth loss, and can reduce the risk of tooth decay and improve health and wellbeing.

### What are the signs and symptoms of gum disease?

- Gums that easily bleed
- Puffy, tender gums
- Teeth that may be sensitive
- Gums which recede or move away from the tooth
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste in the mouth
- Loose teeth
- An abscess (or gum boil)
- Pain



## How can I look after my gums?

- Brush teeth at least twice a day (last thing at night and one other time) with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste containing 1350 to 1500ppm of fluoride.
- Thoroughly clean teeth for at least two minutes. Carefully brush each tooth - front, back and sides, as well as the gum line.
- Spit out after brushing.
- Both manual and powered toothbrushes are effective at cleaning teeth and gums. Choose one with a small head and medium bristles.
- Use dental floss or interdental brushes to remove plaque. Your dental professional can show you how to use these.
- Cut down on how much and how often you have sugary food and drink:
  - ✓ fruit and vegetables are healthy snacks
  - ✓ avoid sugary drinks – milk and water are best
  - ✓ avoid sugary snacks
  - ✓ use sugar-free versions of medicines if possible
- If you use a mouthwash, use it at a different time to brushing, please discuss this with your dental professional.
- Limit your intake of tobacco and alcohol to keep your gums healthy and reduce the risk of mouth cancer.
- Leave dentures out at night to help keep your mouth healthy.
- Make regular trips to the dentist.



## Where can I find out further information?

[Gum disease \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

## References

[Delivering better oral health: an evidence-based toolkit for prevention \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[The NHS website \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

## Images

[Take care of your teeth and gums \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

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