



Dentist

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Periodontitis: A silent threat to oral health

Periodontitis is a serious gum infection that damages the soft tissue and, if left untreated, can destroy the bone that supports your teeth. It is one of the leading causes of tooth loss in adults worldwide, yet it often progresses silently until significant damage has occurred. Recognising its causes, symptoms, and prevention strategies is key to maintaining lifelong oral health.

Periodontitis begins with plaque, which is a sticky film of bacteria that forms on teeth. If plaque is not removed through regular brushing and flossing, it hardens into tartar, which then harbours more bacteria. This buildup irritates the gums, leading to inflammation known as gingivitis. While gingivitis is reversible, untreated cases can advance into periodontitis, where the gums pull away from the teeth, forming pockets that become infected.

Symptoms

The symptoms of periodontitis can be subtle at first. Common signs include swollen or bleeding gums, persistent bad breath, and receding gum lines. As the disease progresses, teeth may loosen or shift, affecting chewing and overall dental function. Since these changes can occur gradually, many people fail to seek treatment until the condition is advanced.

Risk factors play a significant role in the development of periodontitis. Poor oral hygiene is the most obvious contributor, but smoking, diabetes, certain medications, and genetic predisposition also increase vulnerability. Stress and poor nutrition can weaken the body's ability to fight infection, further compounding the risk.

Treatment

Treatment for periodontitis depends on its severity. In the early stages, professional cleaning and improved oral hygiene may be sufficient. More advanced cases require scaling and root planning, which are deep cleaning procedures that remove tartar from below the gum line. This is sometimes done under local anaesthesia. In severe cases, surgical interventions may be necessary to restore supportive tissues. Importantly, treatment is most effective when combined with consistent home care, including twice-daily brushing, daily flossing, and regular dental check-ups.

Prevention remains the most powerful tool against periodontitis. Maintaining good oral hygiene, avoiding tobacco, eating a balanced diet, and managing underlying health conditions can significantly reduce risk. Regular dental visits are essential, as dentists can detect early signs of gum disease before irreversible damage occurs.

Periodontitis is not just a dental issue; research has linked it to systemic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes complications, and respiratory problems. This underscores the importance of viewing oral health as integral to overall well-being. By taking proactive steps, individuals can protect their gums, preserve their teeth, and safeguard their general health.

