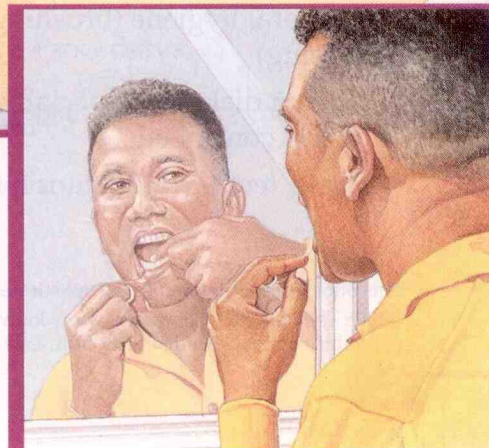


# Understanding and Treating Periodontal Disease



**Restoring the Health  
of Your Teeth and Gums**

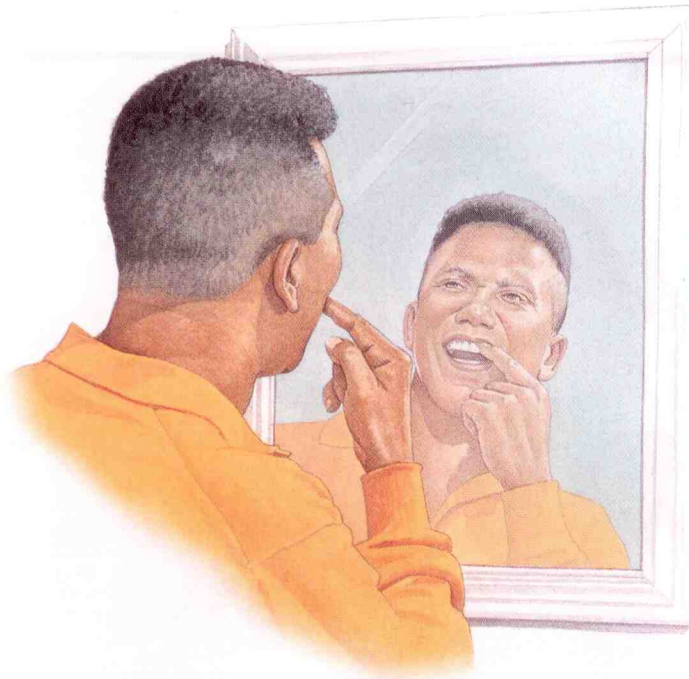


# What Is Periodontal Disease?

Periodontal disease affects the structures in the mouth that support the teeth. It's sometimes called "gum disease," but it involves bone and other tissues, too. This disease is often **chronic** (persists over time). The good news is that treatment can limit damage and help keep your mouth healthier.

## A Silent Disease

Periodontal disease often causes no symptoms, especially in its early stages. But don't be fooled: This "silent" disease can still damage the gums, bone, and other tissues that surround the teeth. Unless it's treated, this damage will worsen. Eventually this can lead to tooth loss. There is also evidence that the bacteria that cause periodontal disease are linked to more general health problems. These include heart disease, pregnancy complications, and other serious conditions.



Some people notice tender or receding gums, but periodontal disease often causes no symptoms.

## What Puts You At Risk

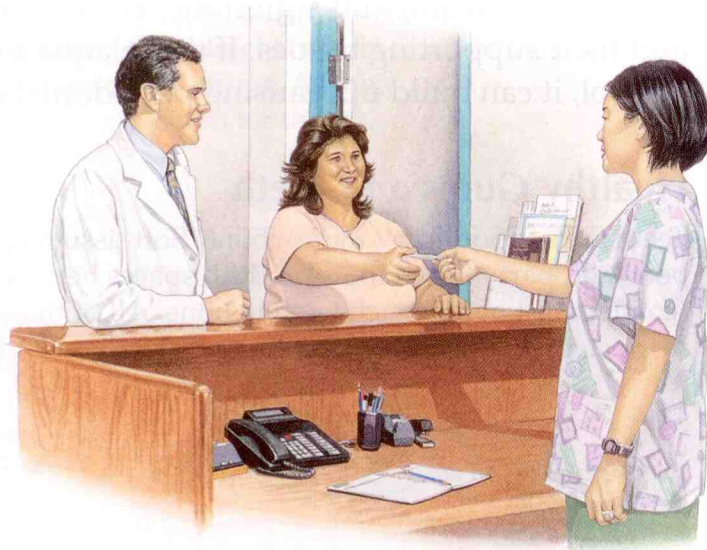
Some of the factors that put you at risk can be controlled, others can't. Though age is not a risk factor, older people often have more severe disease because there has been more time for damage to occur. Risk factors include:

- Smoking
- Poor oral hygiene (brushing and flossing)
- Having diabetes, especially if it's poorly controlled
- Stress, teeth-grinding, or bite problems
- Hormone changes, such as those during pregnancy
- Having a weakened immune system
- Having a close family member with periodontal disease
- Taking certain medications

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## Treatment for Periodontal Disease

Special dental cleanings, medications, and surgery are among the treatments for this disease. The sooner you're treated, the better the outcome. If periodontal disease is caught early, your dentist may be able to reverse some or all of the damage with non-surgical treatments. If the disease is more advanced, surgery may stop further damage. In many cases, it can save teeth you're in danger of losing. Much of the outcome is up to you, though. You'll need to commit to taking better care of your teeth at home. And you'll need regular **maintenance** (upkeep) dental care.



## Your Dental Team

These professionals may be involved in your care:

- A **dental hygienist** performs routine cleanings and in some cases certain nonsurgical treatments. Your hygienist can be a key ally.
- A **general dentist** treats a wide range of dental problems. This may include diagnosing and treating your periodontal disease. Or you may be referred to a periodontist for evaluation and treatment.
- A **periodontist** is a dentist who specializes in evaluating and treating periodontal disease. He or she performs both surgical and nonsurgical treatments.

In this booklet, "dentist" refers to both periodontists and general dentists.

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