

Uncovering the Root of Gingivitis

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Everyday we are bombarded by both print and television ads from major toothpaste and mouthwash companies, regarding the dangers and prevention of gingivitis. What these ads tend to do is confuse and misinform the viewer/reader in an attempt to get them to buy their products. Gingivitis is the medical term for the inflammation or irritation of the gum tissue around the roots of teeth. It is also the initial stage of periodontal (gum) disease. **Everyone** has some form of gingivitis.

Why does everyone have gingivitis, and what causes it? Your teeth are covered with a thin film of bacteria called plaque. Brushing and flossing help to control this plaque, and prevent it from causing tooth decay. When the plaque on your teeth is not controlled, it hardens into what is called tartar or calculus. When the calculus accumulates around the gum line, it causes the tissue to become swollen, irritated and bleeds.

Preventing Gum Disease

If gingivitis is not controlled at this point, gum damage will continue. The gums will pull away from the teeth, allowing pockets to form, and establishing prime areas for infection. This infection leads to the loss of teeth and bone, halitosis, and has been shown to be a fac-

tor in heart disease and pregnancy complications. The good news is that in its early stages, gingivitis is reversible. With regular dental cleanings and check-ups, along with good home care, gingivitis can be controlled.

Along with seeing your dentist at least twice a year, good home care (brushing, flossing and rinsing) is the best ways to fight gingivitis. The key to good home care is to create a routine, which is easy to follow and utilize implements that are easy to use. Extra soft bristles on your toothbrush are a must, whether it is a manual or mechanical toothbrush. Finding the correct size toothbrush head is also important—one that is too large will prevent cleaning in hard-to-reach areas.

When brushing is impossible, rinsing is advised, as this helps prevent plaque from forming, thereby reducing the negative effects of the bacteria, which live in the oral cavity. I highly recommend the use of Oxyfresh toothpaste and rinse. They both contain fluoride (which prevents tooth decay) and chlorine dioxide (which kills bacteria and deodorizes). Both of these products (unlike Scope and Listerine) are alcohol free. It is important for the rinse you use to be alcohol free because alcohol can dry your mouth, making it more difficult to improve and alleviate bad breath.

Establishing Healthy Dental Routine

There are four simple steps one must follow in establishing a healthy dental routine. First, **brush thoroughly**, at least twice a day, with fluoride toothpaste. Second, **floss** at least once a day to remove the bacteria from between the teeth. The best time to do this is right before bed. If you do not floss or floss infrequently, you may notice bleeding or soreness around the necks of your teeth. This is normal and will go away after approximately one week of regular flossing. If the bleeding continues, see your dentist. Third, **limit snacking**, especially of sugary or refined carbohydrates, as these foods supply the bacteria, which promote gum disease, tooth decay and bad breath.

Finally, **visit a dentist at least twice a year** (unless you are advised to come more often). At these visits your dentist and hygienist can check the health of your teeth and gums, and make suggestions where needed to improve techniques of home care and diet. I can't stress enough—brush, floss, rinse and see your dentist regularly. A healthy smile is a beautiful smile!◆

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