

Gingival Disease



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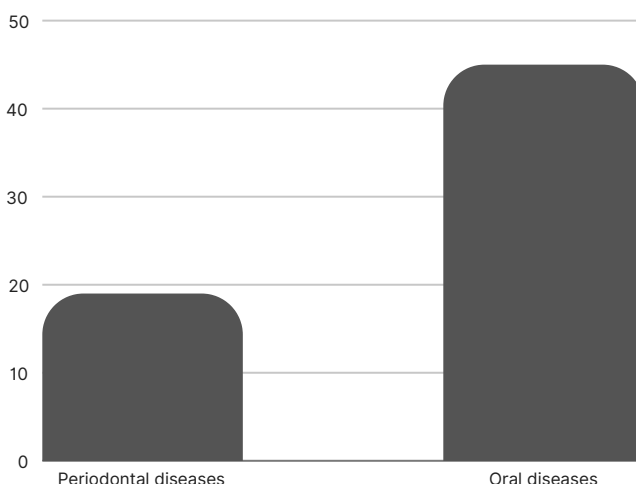
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Introduction

The WHO has defined oral health as “the state of the mouth, teeth and orofacial structures that enables individuals to perform essential functions, such as eating, breathing and speaking, and encompasses psychosocial dimensions, such as self-confidence, well-being and the ability to socialize and work without pain, discomfort and embarrassment. Oral health varies over the life course from early life to old age, is integral to general health and supports individuals in participating in society and achieving their potential” [1].

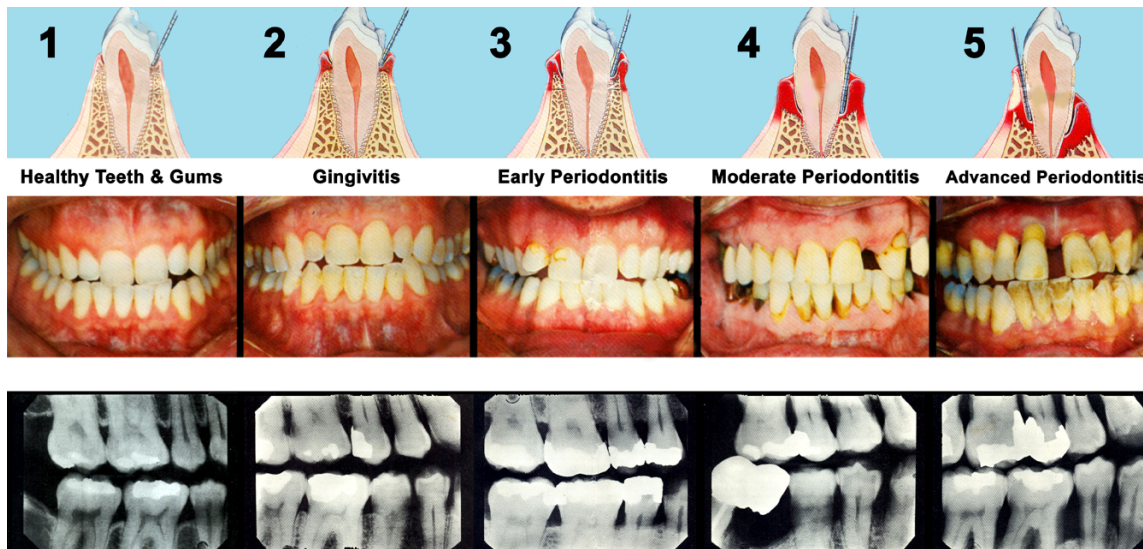
Although oral diseases are preventable, they affect almost half of the world population (45%) including dental caries, periodontitis (gingivitis), edentulism, and oral cancer [1,2]. Periodontal diseases (gingivitis) are estimated to affect probably 19% of the population worldwide [2].

Gingival diseases are a group of conditions that affect the supporting tissues of the teeth, including the gums and surrounding bones. Among the most common diseases in this category are gingivitis and periodontitis. If left untreated, these diseases can lead to tooth loss [3]. This article aims to discuss the types of gum diseases, their causes, associated symptoms, available treatments, methods of prevention, and examples.



Types of Gingival Disease

There are mainly two types of gingival diseases:



- **Gingivitis:** It is the mildest form of gingival disease, characterized by inflammation in the soft tissue surrounding the teeth without affecting the bones. Usually, gingivitis is treatable if diagnosed at an early stage.

Example: A person who brushes his teeth less often than advised will develop a Gingivitis and will start bleeding from the gums when brushing or flossing.

- **Periodontitis:** is an advanced stage of gingivitis wherein the inflammation of the gums extends into the bones that support the teeth. If left unmanaged, it could lead to the destruction of tissues and bones supporting the teeth, which can be linked to probable tooth loss.

Example: A chronic smoker who does not attend regular dental checkups and has serious halitosis or receding gums can be a patient with periodontitis [3].

Causes of Gingival Disease

Diseases of the gums come about as a result of the build-up of plaque in the teeth. Dental biofilm refers to that thin sticky layer of bacteria that forms on teeth if not regularly removed by proper brushing and flossing. Many factors lead to diseases of the gums. These are:

- **Poor oral hygiene:** Poor dental hygiene results in the accumulation of bacteria and plaque, hence encouraging gingivitis and periodontitis.

For instance, a teenager who does not brush his teeth at night and rarely flosses can, in due time, develop plaque and, as a result, gingivitis.

- **Hormonal changes:** These are the increase or decrease in the levels of some hormones during pregnancy or menopause, which heightens the sensitivity of the gums to the point that they are even prone to inflammation.

Example: A pregnant woman may be aware that during the period of her pregnancy, her gums are much more swollen than usual, and they easily bleed, due to the hormonal changes within the body affecting her gums.

- Chronic diseases: Diseases such as diabetes and heart diseases increase the chances of periodontal disease.

Example: For a patient experiencing uncontrolled diabetes, the health of the gums is worsened; therefore, this creates better grounds for them to succumb to periodontitis and eventually the loss of the teeth if the condition of the gums is not treated.

- Tobacco use: This is among the major factors that increases the development of gum diseases.

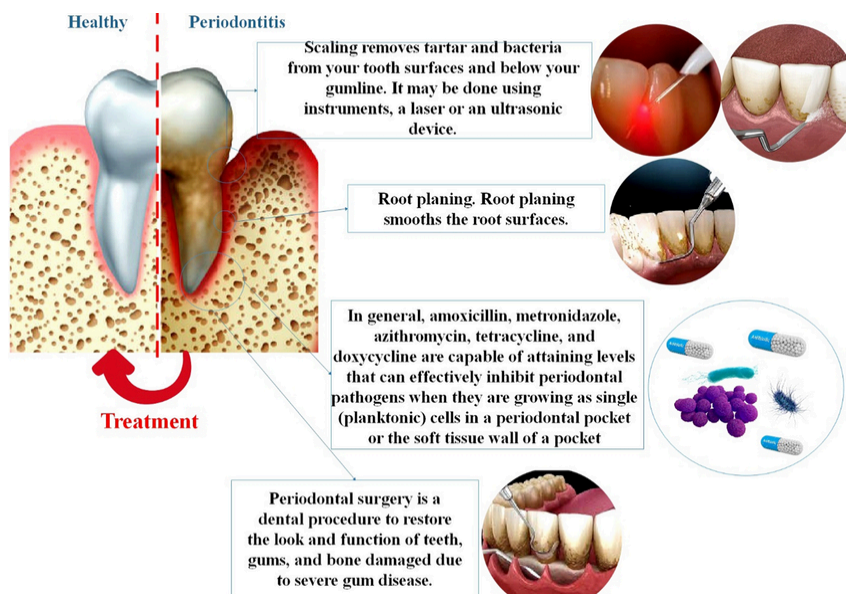
The chronic tobacco smokers, for example, have deep gum pockets and bone loss as a result of the degenerative action of tobacco on the gum tissues [3].

Symptoms of Gingival Disease

Common symptoms include:

- Bleeding gums when brushing or flossing
- Persistent bad breath
- Gaps forming between the teeth and gums
- Red and swollen gums
- Gum recession
- Tooth loss in advanced cases [3].

Treatment of Gingival Disease



- Professional dental cleaning: is the principal procedure in the removal of plaque and tartar that has consequently built up on the teeth. Regular cleaning would prevent further development of gingivitis into periodontitis.

For example: professional cleaning every six months will be a good recommendation for a patient with mild gingivitis to remove plaque and prevent further damage to the gums.

- Gum surgery: Advanced periodontitis may require surgery to remove the damaged tissue and rebuild the affected bone.

Example: People with profound periodontal pockets need to undergo flap surgery to clean the root areas and regenerate lost bone tissue.

- Antibiotic treatment: Doctors may prescribe antibiotics to help deal with the bacterial infection that accompanies periodontitis.

The treatment might include oral or topical antibiotics over a period of time for a patient with severe periodontitis, with the aim of controlling the growth of bacteria [3].

Prevention of Gingival Disease

Gum diseases can be prevented by following several healthy practices:

- Regular brushing and flossing of the teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice daily and cleaning between the teeth with floss.

For instance, a conscientious person would brush his teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and use floss after meals to clean between his teeth to avoid plaque.

- Regular dental checkup: It aids in the early detection of the disease through routine visits, and proper treatment is provided to the patient.

Example: A patient who visits his dentist every six months for check-ups or professional cleaning can reduce the possibility of serious periodontal diseases.

- quit smoking: Stopping the habit of smoking is one of the surest ways of reducing the risk of periodontal disease.

For instance, cessation of tobacco product use by a chronic smoker, coupled with the adoption of good oral hygiene behaviors, can bring about significant improvement in the health of their gums [3].

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