

Information about gum health

Why you might be at risk of gum disease and what you can do to stay healthy.

You currently have healthy gums. This leaflet provides you with information to:

- help you keep your gums healthy;
- prevent gum disease developing in the future.

Healthy gums

Healthy gums are pale pink in colour and don't bleed when you brush your teeth. Healthy gums hold your teeth tightly in place in your jaw. If you have healthy gums, you are less likely to lose your teeth as you get older. This is why it is important to try to prevent gum problems from starting.



Image showing healthy gums

Symptoms of gum disease

Gum disease is very common but isn't always painful, and you might not be aware that you have it. Symptoms include bleeding or swollen gums, gum recession (which makes your teeth look longer), bad breath and pain from the gums. More severe gum disease can lead to wobbly teeth, gum abscesses and a change in the position of the teeth.

The main cause of gum disease is dental plaque (a mixture of bacteria and food debris). Dental plaque builds up on your teeth and irritates your gums. This is why it is important to clean your teeth regularly and effectively.

What can I do to keep my gums healthy?

Some people are more likely to develop gum problems. However, there are several things you can do to reduce the chance of that happening to you.

1. Use a toothbrush to regularly and effectively clean your gums and teeth.

Brush your gums and teeth twice a day to remove dental plaque.

The diagram below shows the angle at which you should try and hold your toothbrush. Aim to brush every surface of your teeth, paying particular attention to where the gums and teeth meet.



Diagram showing the angle at which you should try to hold your toothbrush while brushing your teeth.

If your gums do bleed when you brush your teeth, don't stop. Bleeding gums are a sign of inflammation and disease which is due to dental plaque. Instead, keep brushing regularly to remove the plaque and arrange to see a dental professional for advice.

When you brush, use a toothpaste that contains fluoride. You should look on the toothpaste packaging for words like "contains sodium fluoride (1450 ppm F)". The recommended amount of fluoride is between 1350 and 1500 parts per million (ppm) fluoride (F). The toothpaste packaging might look like this:

sources consult a dentist or doctor.

Contains: Sodium Monofluorophosphate (1450 ppm F)

Ingredients: Dicalcium Phosphate Dihydrate, Aqua, Glycine, Arginine, Sodium Lauryl Sulfate, Cellulose Gum, Sodium

When you have finished brushing your teeth, spit the toothpaste out but don't rinse your mouth. This protects your teeth from decay.

Turn the tap off while brushing your teeth to avoid wasting water.

Mouthwashes do not usually help. If you notice gum symptoms, see a dental professional rather than relying on mouthwashes.

2. Clean between your teeth.

Clean the spaces between your teeth with interdental brushes or dental floss. This can be tricky to do. Seek advice from your dental team about what tools will work best for you and how to use them.

3. Do not smoke.

People who smoke get more gum disease and are more likely to lose their teeth. We don't yet fully understand how vaping (e-cigarettes) affects the gums. If you smoke, consider stopping. The dental team can point you to resources to help you quit if you would like to.

4. If you have diabetes, aim to keep it well controlled.

If you have diabetes, let your dental team know. People with diabetes are more likely to develop gum problems. The dental team will monitor your gum condition and give you advice on how to keep your gums healthy.

5. If you are pregnant, visit your dental team.

Bleeding gums are common during pregnancy; this is almost always reversible with early treatment and home care. If you are pregnant, try to visit the dental team. They will give you help and advice about the best ways of cleaning your teeth at home and will help you if gum problems develop.

6. Visit your dentist.

Attend your dentist when they advise you to. This will allow the dental team to spot early signs of gum problems. It is much easier to manage and reverse problems at an early stage and treatment will be more straightforward.

This resource may be made available in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on 0131 656 3200 or email altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

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