



Preventing Periodontal Disease

One out of every two American adults age 30 or older has periodontal disease, according to a study published in the *Journal of Dental Research*. If you're not taking care of your oral health, you could be jeopardizing a lot more than your smile.

Periodontal disease is a chronic bacterial infection that affects gums and bone supporting the teeth. Major risk factors for gum disease are poor dental hygiene and smoking. Diabetes, unhealthy diet, and stress can also increase your chance of developing gum disease.

Periodontal disease can indicate a host of health problems throughout the body such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Many people have mild cases of gum disease, called gingivitis, which is characterized by swollen, red, and bleeding gums. If left untreated, gingivitis can grow into a more serious form of gum disease called periodontitis. Researchers believe that periodontal disease may cause health problems throughout the body by circulating bacteria from the mouth through the bloodstream, causing new infections. Inflammation, which can damage tissues, may also occur in other places in the body. Gingivitis can be prevented and even reversed with good oral hygiene.

Take care of your gums by following the steps below:

- Brush your teeth gently, at least twice a day, with special attention to the gum line. Use a fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss at least once a day. Your teeth aren't truly clean until they're brushed and flossed.
- Replace your toothbrush every three or four months.
- Avoid smoking and all tobacco products.
- Avoid sugary snacks and beverages.
- Visit the dentist routinely for a check-up and professional cleanings.