

## Gum disease is a bacterial infection. Treatment can help.

Gum disease—also known as periodontal disease—is a bacterial infection that can harm the gums and bone that support your teeth. Understanding how gum disease happens can help make [your treatment goals](#) clearer.

### Plaque buildup starts above the gums

The bacteria in our mouths are constantly creating a sticky substance—plaque—that clings to the teeth. Daily brushing and flossing can remove most plaque. But plaque that remains can gradually harden into a tougher substance called tartar, which brushing can't help. Only a professional cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist can remove tartar.

### Buildup can lead to gum infection

If bacterial plaque on teeth isn't removed, the gums can become infected and inflamed. This is gingivitis, a mild form of gum disease. In this early stage, infected gums may be bright red and swollen; gum bleeding can also occur. The good news: Gingivitis can often be reversed with professional cleanings and good at-home care.



### Infection can spread lower, forming pockets

Without treatment, the gums can begin to pull away from the teeth, creating pockets of diseased tissue.

This allows bacteria to spread to the roots of the teeth, which can make pockets even deeper. Over time, the bones, gums, and connective tissue that support the teeth can be permanently damaged. Eventually, unsupported teeth can become loose and have to be removed.

Gum disease does not have to get that far. With timely treatment, you and your dental professional can target infection, which may allow your gums to heal, get stronger, and hold your teeth more securely.

### Pocket depth: A measure of gum health

Your dental professional measures pocket depth with a tiny probe. A pocket of 4 mm or more may be a sign of gum disease. Over time, pockets that grow deeper may indicate

gum disease is getting worse. And pockets that become less deep can be a positive sign that your treatment is working.



A pocket depth of **4 mm** or more may mean you have an infection.

## Even the best hygienists can only do so much.

A procedure known as **scaling and root planing (SRP)** is a widely used treatment for gum disease.

**Scaling** is the manual removal of plaque and tartar from the teeth and their roots



**Planing** smooths out rough spots on the roots where bacteria can gather

SRP is highly effective, but it has a few limitations. Dental instruments cannot always reach the base of deeper pockets in the gum tissue, where infection can continue to thrive.

That's why many dental professionals now use a combination approach that pairs an antibiotic such as minocycline HCl with SRP procedures. Unlike antibiotics taken as a pill, it is locally applied directly at the gum infection site.

### Questions to ask your dentist:

1. How can I avoid getting gum disease?
2. Have you measured the pocket depth around my teeth?
3. If I am showing signs of gum disease, what treatment options other than scaling and root planing are available?
4. How often should I be coming in for scaling and root planing?
5. How can I tell if my gum disease is improving?