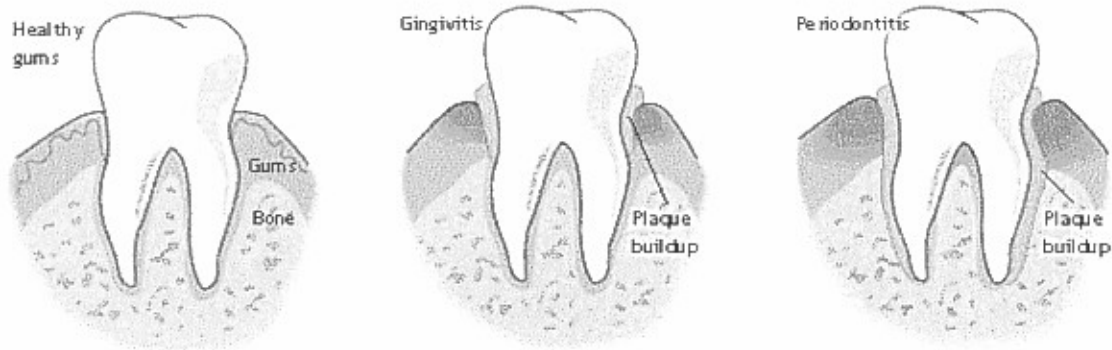


# Taking Care of Your Gums

from the JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association) Patient Page

[http://www.ama-assn.org/insight/spec\\_con/patient/pat116.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/insight/spec_con/patient/pat116.htm)

Good oral hygiene (brushing your teeth and flossing, for example) reduces the risk of cavities. Regular oral hygiene also helps reduce the risk of gum disease, which is caused by the same bacteria (found in dental plaque) that causes tooth decay and cavities.



Dental plaque is a sticky deposit of bacteria, mucus, food particles, and other irritants found around the base of the teeth. The toxic effects produced by the bacteria in dental plaque cause both tooth decay and gum disease. (Dental plaque is composed of different material from the plaque found in arteries. The plaque found in arteries is composed mainly of fats and proteins.)

**Gingivitis** is inflammation of the gums (or **gingiva**), the soft tissue that surrounds the base of your teeth. Gingivitis is usually caused by the buildup of plaque. The toxic effects of the bacteria cause gums to become irritated, red, and swollen and the gums may bleed easily. The plaque also forces the gums to recede from the teeth.

Gingivitis can develop into the more serious condition called **periodontitis**. Periodontitis is inflammation of membranes around the base of the teeth. Periodontitis can cause erosion of the bone holding the teeth in place resulting in tooth loss.