

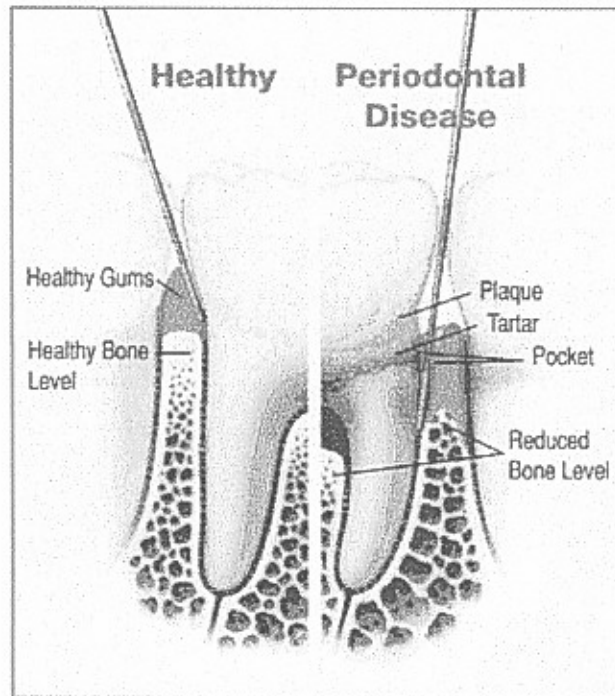
# What Are Periodontal Diseases

From the The American Academy of Periodontology

<http://www.perio.org/consumer/2a.html>

Periodontal (gum) diseases, including gingivitis and periodontitis, are serious infections that, left untreated, can lead to tooth loss. The word *periodontal* literally means "around the tooth." Periodontal disease is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums and bone supporting the teeth.

Periodontal disease can affect one tooth or many teeth. It begins when the bacteria in plaque (the sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth) causes the gums to become inflamed.



In the mildest form of the disease, gingivitis, the gums redden, swell and bleed easily. There is usually little or no discomfort. Gingivitis is often caused by inadequate oral hygiene. Gingivitis is reversible with professional treatment and good oral home care.

Untreated gingivitis can advance to periodontitis. With time, plaque can spread and grow below the gum line. Toxins produced by the bacteria in plaque irritate the gums. The toxins stimulate a chronic inflammatory response in which the body in essence turns on itself, and the tissues and bone that support the teeth are broken down and destroyed. Gums separate from the teeth, forming pockets (spaces between the teeth and gums) that become infected. As the disease progresses, the pockets deepen and more gum tissue and bone are destroyed. Often, this destructive process has very mild symptoms. Eventually, teeth can become loose and may have to be removed.

## **Types of Periodontal Disease**

There are many forms of periodontal disease. The most common ones include the following.

### **Gingivitis**

Gingivitis is the mildest form of periodontal disease. It causes the gums to become red, swollen, and bleed easily. There is usually little or no discomfort at this stage. Gingivitis is reversible with professional treatment and good at home oral care.

### **Mild Periodontitis**

If gingivitis, the mildest form of periodontal disease, is left untreated, it can advance to periodontitis. In the mild stage, periodontal diseases begin to destroy the bone and tissue that support the teeth.

### **Moderate to Advanced Periodontitis**

Moderate to advanced periodontitis develops if earlier forms of the disease like gingivitis and mild periodontitis are left untreated. This is the most advanced form of the disease in which extensive bone and tissue loss occurs.

### **Juvenile Periodontitis**

Localized juvenile periodontitis (LJP) occurs in adolescents and is characterized by the rapid loss of bone around permanent teeth. Ironically, youngsters with LJP form very little dental plaque or tartar. Generalized juvenile periodontitis is often considered a disease of young adults, although it can begin around puberty. It is characterized by marked inflammation and heavy accumulations of plaque and calculus. Pockets can form around the affected teeth, filling with infection. If not treated early, infection can lead to bone loss which may cause the teeth to become loose.