

HEALTH

Treating gum disease with greater comfort, better results

By *Stephen Durham*
CONTRIBUTOR

Fully one-half of all Americans have periodontal disease. For adults it is the No. 1 cause of tooth loss.

Today there is a treatment that is more effective, with less recovery time than traditional gum surgery. So it's much easier now to deal with gum disease, and that's good, because without treatment the consequences are both common and serious.



Stephen Durham

Why periodontal problems are common:

Thanks to toothpaste commercials, we are all familiar with plaque, the film that

can collect on teeth, especially in hard-to-reach nooks and crannies.

Plaque hardens into tartar, and tartar becomes home for bacteria. Tartar deposits often form at the base of the teeth and get below the gum line onto the root of the tooth.

An early stage of gum disease, called gingivitis, shows up as discolored or swollen gums, sometimes bleeding when you brush.

Left unchecked – or undetected, as gingivitis often is – this can progress to periodontal disease. Pockets of infection form in the gums and separate the gum from the tooth.

Loosening and threatening the teeth is not the only consequence of ignoring gum disease, though.

How something so commonplace can be so bad:

Since the gums are a kind of buffer

between the bloodstream, the jawbone and the outside world, bad things can happen all over the place when this bacteria causes inflammation.

Gum disease has also been linked to infection elsewhere in the body. And chronic inflammation – even in the gums – can lead to heart disease.

So treatment calls for getting rid of those pockets of infection, closing the gap between gum and tooth, and restoring a healthy support structure.

Eliminating the threat with less discomfort and downtime:

Patients with periodontal disease can avoid scalpel-and-suture gum surgery with a proven, patient-friendly, minimally invasive laser treatment that involves less time, less discomfort and often no time lost from work.

Using a tiny laser fiber – about the diameter of three human hairs – treat-

ment is applied around the base and root of the tooth, to clear out infection and set the stage for a healthy support structure.

Remaining plaque deposits are removed from the tooth.

Then the gap is closed between tooth and gum to begin the healing process with healthy tissue.

Eating a soft diet for a day or two is advised, but many patients feel good enough to eat whatever they want right away.

Most go right back to work with no downtime.

Perhaps best of all, 98 percent of laser therapy patients have stable teeth and gums after five years. Less discomfort, less downtime, better results – and less reason to put off treatment.

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