

Why do I need a professional teeth cleaning?

No matter how diligent you are at taking care of your teeth at home, harmful bacteria grow in your mouth that can only be removed by a dental professional. These bacteria can cause gum disease, and significantly affect your overall health. The bacteria that cause gum disease are the same as those linked to heart disease and other illnesses, and as many as 90% of adults have some form of gum disease. Your hygienist and dentist work together as co-therapists to help you manage your oral health.

What happens when bacteria grow in my mouth?

Because the warm, moist oral environment is very hospitable to bacteria, bacteria can manifest in several ways.

Plaque is a bio-film formed by the colonies of bacteria that live in your mouth. Plaque produces an acid which is destructive to your teeth and gums unless removed.

Calculus or tartar forms when plaque is not properly removed and the bacterial colonies calcify and mineralize into a hard substance, which then attracts more harmful bacteria.

Gingivitis is gum disease caused by bacteria that are in active, destructive state. Your gums become inflamed, swell and redden in response to the infection. To prevent advancement to periodontal disease, this condition must be aggressively treated. Blood on your toothbrush or when rinsing after brushing is a sign of gingivitis.

Periodontal Disease, also called Periodontitis, is an active infection that destroys the very foundation of your teeth, the bone which keeps your teeth attached to your jaw. Left untreated, periodontal disease can cause so much bone loss that your teeth become loose and fall out. Periodontal disease is diagnosed by measuring the depth of your gum pockets, checking for bleeding sites, and by assessing bone loss through digital x-rays and clinical observation. Periodontal disease is chronic, progressive, and episodic. While periodontal disease is irreversible, much like diabetes, it can be managed in partnership with your dental professionals.

Pockets are the spaces between your tooth and gum tissue. A healthy gum pocket is between 1-3mm in depth. Bacteria love to colonize these pockets. Pocket depths of 4 or more millimeters indicate active periodontal disease.

Bleeding when brushing or measuring the gum pockets, red, puffy gums, are the first signs of infection.

Home Tools for Managing Oral Bacteria

Healthy Diet - A key to good oral hygiene and overall well-being; we love chocolate too, but limit snacks and sweets. It is particularly important to avoid sugary sports drinks, which over time break down healthy tooth structure and make teeth more susceptible to decay.

Toothbrush – Brush at least twice a day, preferably after every meal, for at least two minutes each time. **Remember to turn off the water while you brush!** Sonic/electric toothbrushes are highly effective at removing plaque. It's important to change your toothbrush/brush head every 3-4 months. Your hygienist will recommend the right toothbrush for you, and provide you with brushing techniques in your hygiene consultation.

Dental Floss – Flossing is a critical part of managing oral bacterial growth. If you don't floss, you aren't cleaning 33% of your teeth surfaces! Your hygienist will help you with effective flossing technique in your hygiene consultation.

Tongue Scraper – Your tongue is like a shag carpet that has many thousands of crevices packed with bacteria! It is critical to clean your tongue with a scraper daily. Many people skip this important step in bacteria removal.

Mouth Tonic – Use tonics that are alcohol-free and contain pure plant essential oils that are naturally antiseptic and anti-bacterial. Avoid mouth washes with alcohol, because it dries the mouth, and actually promotes bacterial growth that can cause bad breath, the very reason we use it.

Specialized Home Tools – Special tools used for things like cleaning wisdom teeth, spaces, gaps, and areas of recession may be recommended by your dental professional, who will coach you in proper technique.

Professional Tools for Managing Oral Bacteria

Micro-ultrasonic scaler – ultrasonic cleaning device which combines vibration and a pressurized stream of water to disrupt and remove live and calcified bacteria

Fine hand instruments – called scalers or curettes, used to remove small bacterial deposits and to smooth tooth surfaces

Polishing cup/polishing paste – used to remove stains and plaque and make teeth feel smooth

Laser Light – Only about 5% of dental practices that use laser light to help treat gum and periodontal disease. This virtually painless method of removing bacteria from infected gum pockets is highly effective when combined with proper home care.

Site-specific Antibiotic Therapy - placing antibiotics directly into gum pockets to minimize future growth of bacteria

Types of Professional Teeth Cleanings

Your dental professional will assess your oral health to determine the right type of professional cleaning for you.

PROPHYLAXIS (prophy) – traditionally called a “teeth cleaning,” prophylaxis removes plaque build-up that cannot be removed by brushing, and includes tooth polishing. New data suggest that teeth should be cleaned every 8-16 weeks

Indications: no sign of periodontal disease, no gum pockets over 3 mm or bleeding sites, and pink, firm gums

Tools Used: ultrasonic scaler, fine hand instruments, polishing cup and paste

FULL MOUTH DEBRIDEMENT – when teeth have not been professionally cleaned for more than a year and there is heavy tartar build-up, a full mouth debridement is often necessary

Indications: significant calculus build-up in several areas in the mouth

Tools Used: micro-ultrasonic scaler, hand tools

GINGIVAL BACTERIAL REDUCTION– laser light to kill bacteria in infected gum pockets throughout the mouth, combined with the services of a prophylaxis

Indications: Gingivitis, presenting with bleeding, puffy, or red gums

Tools Used: laser light, ultrasonic scaler, fine hand instruments, polishing cup and paste

SITE-SPECIFIC LASER THERAPY – when bacteria infects both the gums and the bones which hold the teeth in place, we laser light is used to disrupt and attack the colonies of bacteria deep inside the gum pockets at each individual infected tooth site

Indications: Slight to severe periodontal disease

Tools Used: Micro-ultrasonic scaler, fine hand instruments, laser light

PERIODONTAL MAINTENANCE – to help maintain the results of treatment for periodontal disease, this specialized cleaning is performed every 8, 10, or 12 weeks

Indications: Prior diagnosis of periodontal disease.

Tools used: Micro-ultrasonic scaler, fine hand instruments, laser light, polishing cup and paste.