

TEN AND A HALF THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PERIODONTAL DISEASE

- 1) Periodontal disease is considered *an irreversible disease*. The loss of bone that supports and surrounds the teeth is permanent. (There are some bone grafting techniques that can partially restore bone; but only in very specific areas).
- 2) Periodontal tissues are those tissues that surround and support the teeth. They are both the soft gum tissues and the hard bone tissues and are collectively known as *the periodontium*.
- 3) Periodontal disease is generally *a “silent” disease*, where the patient does not physically sense problems and is free of symptoms in the early and middle stages, even though active destruction of gum and bone tissues is going on.
- 4) A patient has periodontal disease, by definition, if there is any measure of *bone loss* as typically seen on dental x-rays. The name of the bone that supports the teeth is called alveolar bone and the loss occurs initially at the very top of this bony ridge, the crest.
- 5) Periodontal disease is characterized as *a chronic bacterial infection*. There are specific species of bacteria involved. As time proceeds there are worsening types of bacteria that predominate, ones that are truly disease-causing. The bacteria are always found in complex colonies and populations within plaque. Plaque is a dynamic and ever changing entity. Periodontal disease is caused by this plaque when it accumulates in the space between the gumline and the tooth, when the “infection” is long-standing, and when the patient is susceptible.

- 6) One of the most important anatomical features to understand is that space between the gumline and the tooth; it is commonly referred to as the sulcus (in health) and ***the pocket*** (in unhealth). It would be exemplified as the space where floss can move between the tooth and gum tissue. The sulcus is present around the entire circumference of the tooth and is usually about 3mm deep. The bottom of the sulcus is where the gum physically attaches to the root surface. A periodontal pocket can be defined as that space 4mm and deeper. The pocket helps to identify the potential presence of periodontal disease, and also helps to mark the presence of gum tissue inflammation.
- 7) The destruction of the periodontal tissues occurs because of the body's own immune response, which is simply termed ***inflammation***. The inflammation or immune system cells and the molecules they release defend against bacteria. Unfortunately, these same cells and molecules can ultimately destroy normal tissues. The vigor of the inflammation response can vary greatly among patients.
- 8) There are many ***contributing or risks factors*** related to periodontal disease. These factors either worsen the disease if one has it or makes one more susceptible to developing it. Examples are smoking, diabetes, stress, heredity, teeth grinding, poorly restored teeth, etc.
- 9) Research and studies are finding associations between periodontal disease and ***systemic diseases***. These include but are not limited to: cardiovascular disease, stroke, and diabetes. Studies are also looking at possible links between periodontal disease and other conditions such as: Alzheimer's, osteoporosis, and babies born pre-term.
- 10) If a person chooses to ***floss daily*** (with good technique), uses a quality toothbrush, applies rinses or tools to reduce bacterial populations in other areas of the mouth, eliminates as many contributing and risks factors as possible, is regular with their periodic teeth cleanings, has good overall health, that person should be able to attain a sound periodontal condition.
 - ½) Most forms of periodontal disease can be treated successfully. It takes self-acknowledgement, willingness to change behaviors, self-motivation, perseverance, and partnership with a dental office that is concerned about you. The end!