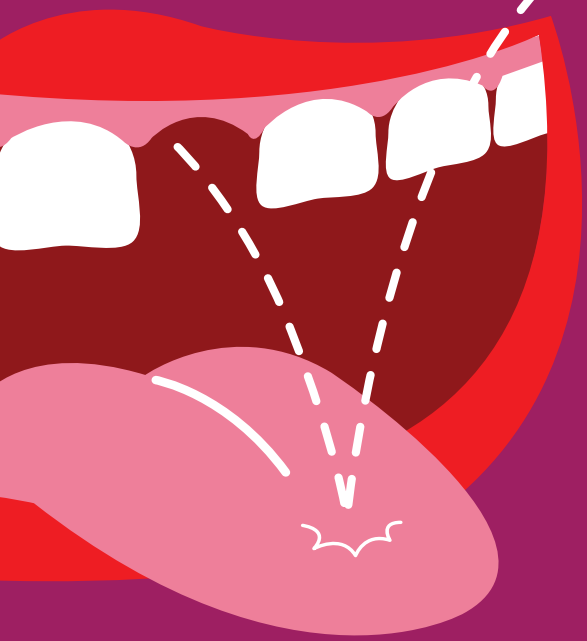
WHAT HIDES BENEATH?



DID YOU KNOW THAT GUM DISEASE CAN DAMAGE YOUR GENERAL HEALTH?

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What is Gum Disease?

Gum disease is an infection of the tissues surrounding the teeth. Infection leads to a red, swollen and tender area. This area often bleeds when the teeth are brushed or the tender area is touched. This is particularly important as bleeding gums have been linked with a number of health risks including heart disease and diabetes.

How does gum disease occur?

- Gum disease occurs when large amounts of bacteria stick together to form a sticky substance called dental plaque.
- This plaque lives where the gum and the teeth meet and causes extreme irritation leading to a red, swollen and tender area.
- As the area becomes more swollen the gums separate from the teeth leading to the development of a pocket where more dental plaque lives and eventually damages the gum and kills the bone around the tooth.

How common is gum disease?

- Gum disease is the most common infectious disease affecting more than 80% of people worldwide.
- In Ireland it is estimated that 4 out of 5 people have got some degree of gum disease. The level of gum disease worsens as we get older.
- Oral Health costs the Irish state an estimated €300 million per year in health related bills.

How do I know if I have gum disease?

There are a number of signs and symptoms that may indicate you may have gum disease including;

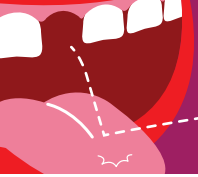
- Dark red or swollen gums
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Pain when you bite on food
- Gums that look like they are low down on the teeth
- Sensitive or loose teeth
- Smelly breath

What should I do if I think I might have gum disease?

The best way to know if you have gum disease is to have a check up with your dentist or dental hygienist to find out the state of your gums, and oral health in general. If it is discovered that you do have gum disease, treatment can be started immediately which will have positive effects on both your oral and general health.

What are the general health factors that cause gum disease?

Cause	Effect
Smoking	Smoking can cause gum disease as the chemicals in inhaled smoke can interfere with the body's ability to repair damaged tissues. It does so by reducing blood flow to the affect area and also limits oxygen and nutrients to the tissue.
Genetics	Gum disease can run in families. If a parent, brother or sister has had gum problems in the past it may indicate that you could have it too.
Obesity	Obesity is caused by excessive intake of sugar. A diet high in sugar can weaken the body's ability to fight infection
Stress	Stress reduces the ability of the body to fight infection, therefore making it easier for the bacteria in the mouth to spread into the bloodstream
Hormones	Hormonal changes in girls and women can make the gums more sensitive and easier to damage
Medications	Many prescription medications can reduce the amount of saliva in the mouth. Saliva has an important cleansing role to play by controlling the numbers of bacteria in your mouth. Some medication taken for epilepsy, organ transplants and some heart conditions can have the side effect of causing your gums to become enlarged which makes them more prone to gum disease.



General Health

Cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular disease is a broad term to describe a range of diseases that affect your heart and blood vessels and can cause heart complications such as chest pain or stroke. If you have bleeding gums it means that there is an open blood vessel allowing bacteria from your teeth to enter into your blood stream.

- If bacteria get into the bloodstream they can stick to the inside of the blood vessels and contribute to narrowing of blood vessels (atherosclerosis) reducing blood flow back to the heart.
- Bacteria can also increase the formation of blood clots. These blood clots can travel around the blood stream until they get stuck in a blood vessel preventing blood flow back to the heart (causing heart attack) or brain (causing stroke).

Diabetes Mellitus

Diabetes Mellitus is a disorder in which blood sugar (glucose) levels are abnormally high. This can lead to nerve damage, blood vessel damage and increased risk of infection.

- When the levels of sugar in the blood are high, the cells in the blood stream that kill bacteria (white blood cells) cannot work properly. The body therefore becomes less able to fight infections.
- If the sugar level is not controlled properly in a patient with Diabetes Mellitus it will lead to higher than normal levels of sugar in the mouth therefore encouraging the growth of the gum disease-causing bacteria.

Other problems associated with gum disease include development of arthritis and low birth weight babies and pulmonary disease (lung disease). The reasons why these problems occur are not clear.

What to do? Your options ....

Tips for a Healthy Mouth

- Brush where the teeth and gums meet, twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste
- Change your toothbrush when the bristles become flattened
- Clean between your teeth with floss or interdental brushes everyday.
- Avoid sugary snacks between meals
- Do not smoke
- Visit your own dentist and dental hygienist regularly

Some useful resources for further information on gum disease:

Irish Dental Hygienists Association **www.idha.ie**
Dublin Dental University Hospital **www.dentalhospital.ie**
Dental Health Foundation **www.dentalhealth.ie**
World Health Organisation **www.who.int/en**

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