

Keeping A Happy Mouth – How to Spot Periodontal Disease

A Happy Mouth Means A Happy Smile!

Teeth that otherwise appear healthy could be lost due to periodontal disease. This is because periodontal disease attacks from beneath teeth where the infection is not easily detected. Despite occurring inside the mouth, persons with periodontal disease may not feel any pain. This does not mean that people with periodontal disease absolutely cannot tell they have it. Fortunately, there are detectable symptoms that warn patients to schedule checkups with their dentists.

Periodontal disease is an infection that causes a breakdown in tooth related tissues. The infection takes place in the sulcus, which is a hole, or space, beneath the tooth. Because the sulcus is roughly a vacant area, bacteria is able to get into it and attack tooth-supporting tissue. After bacteria has attacked the sulcus for an extended period of time periodontal disease begins. The degree of deterioration determines which type of periodontal disease is present. Gingivitis is considered an early stage of the disease and periodontitis is classified as the latter stage. Symptoms that teeth are under attack in an infected person's mouth include:

Gums that bleed from flossing or brushing – One of the first symptoms persons with periodontal disease might notice is gums that bleed from flossing or brushing. Flossing makes detection easy because blood falls into the sink along with saliva when spitting. The same may be true from brushing especially when using a hard toothbrush. Brushers may notice pink coloring in toothpaste froth when they spit. Bleeding gums indicate symptoms of gingivitis and thus is considered the early stage of periodontal disease.

The irony of detecting blood while cleaning teeth with dental floss or toothbrushes is that regular flossing and brushing can actually help prevent periodontal disease and thus can also prevent the presence of blood. Not flossing or brushing the teeth often enough or well enough allows plaque to build against the teeth and plaque leads to the disease.

Tooth roots become visible at the gum line – Plaque, which is actually a form of bacteria, causes a substance (calculus) most often described as tartar to build up against the teeth. Over time, this buildup causes gums to pull away from teeth. As gums pull away they tend to recede downward which causes them to eventually expose the roots. When exposed, roots become visible at the gum line. Those with periodontal disease may notice their roots are showing and their gums may look puffy, swollen, or red.

Teeth that loosen and teeth that fall out – Permanent teeth that become loose for no apparent reason have most likely done so because of periodontal disease that has been left unchecked. Teeth tend to loosen when periodontal disease reaches its advanced stage (periodontitis). During the advanced stage of periodontal disease teeth may even fall out. This happens because damaged gums as well as tooth bones become incapable of supporting teeth and holding them in place.

Change in tooth location when biting or chewing – As teeth lose support from gums and supportive tissue they may begin moving out of their intended positions in the mouth. Unstable teeth in the top of the mouth can eventually become misaligned with teeth in the bottom of the mouth. Likewise, unstable teeth in the lower part of the mouth could become misaligned with teeth in the top of the mouth. Since misaligned teeth lose their ability to directly align with teeth above or below them, the resulting mismatched areas cause biting and chewing positions to change.

Partial dentures that do not fit the same as they used to – Teeth that move about because they have become unstable could cause displacement that affects denture positioning. Dentures that used to feel snug and comfortable could begin to feel tight in the incorrect areas of the gums.

According to the American Dental Association, persons with periodontal disease may also notice their gums are “tender” or that they have “pus between” their teeth and gums. The ADA also cites “bad breath that doesn’t go away” as a symptom of periodontal disease,

Visiting a dentist is important when periodontal disease is suspected in order to verify or to disprove the suspicion that the disease is actually present. This is why the ADA stresses the importance of seeing a dentist right away when affected persons suspect they may have the disease. Only a dentist could say for certain whether a patient has periodontal disease or whether something else is going on in a patient’s mouth.

Keep your and your family’s mouths and smiles happy with regular dental visits!