



Are You Part of the Seventy-Five Percent?



By Walter R. Below, D.M.D.

Nearly 75% of the American adult population suffers from some form of periodontal (gum) disease, and many don't even know it! Gingivitis is the mildest form. Patients may notice bleeding when brushing or flossing. Gums may be red or swollen but with little to no discomfort. Luckily, gingivitis is reversible with regular cleanings and good home care.

However, periodontitis, the next stage of gum disease, is not.

Periodontitis is a chronic disease process. It can be quite aggressive especially with the manifestation of systemic diseases like diabetes. The main cause of periodontitis is bacteria living in plaque that forms constantly on your teeth in as little as one day. Waste and toxins produced by bacteria are what ultimately cause the break down of supporting tooth tissues, bone and gums. This break down of tissue as well as bone loss can either progress slowly or rapidly. Periodontal disease is a *non-curable* chronic disease process, so patients must work at controlling this disease and the factors that bring on the destructive process for as long as they wish to preserve their teeth.

Risk Factors Linked with Gum Disease

Many factors such as smoking/tobacco use, genetics, pregnancy, puberty, stress, clenching or grinding your teeth and poor nutrition can affect your gums. Diabetes or other systemic diseases, medications such as oral contraceptives,

anti-depressants, and certain heart medications may also be contributing factors.

The standard of care is for a periodontal screening to be performed at every re-care appointment. If there is an area of break-down noted on the screening, the patient should be scheduled for a complete periodontal examination. The hygienist checks for bleeding, swelling and the depth of pockets surrounding your teeth. Pockets are measured with a periodontal probe, a tiny ruler that is gently inserted into the pocket around the tooth. A measurement of greater than 3 mm indicates that the disease is present. A measurement of 5 mm or more indicates a deeper pocket and increased severity of the disease including permanent loss of supporting bone.

How to Keep a Healthy Smile for Life

Healthy gums do not bleed from brushing, flossing or the periodontal examination. If there is bleeding, there is infection. If gingivitis or periodontitis is present, the

area around the teeth can be like having a nine inch infected wound.

Some periodontal disease is not curable; the goal in treating periodontitis is to control the infection and stop the progression and further breakdown. Proper brushing and flossing is needed daily to remove the bacteria so it does not have time to destroy more gum and/or bone structure.

Back in the 1800's when life expectancy was 30-40 years old, periodontal disease was not a concern. Today, however, with life expectancy more than doubling that, a little bit of bone loss adds up over the years. If a patient was to lose half a millimeter of bone a year, in ten years that would equal five millimeters of bone loss. That is close to one third of the bone structure around teeth. The more bone loss that occurs, the harder it is to maintain your teeth and the faster they can be lost. People hit their golden years at 60, and if they have not maintained oral hygiene and health, tooth loss will occur. If tooth loss occurs at this age, they need to adjust

Dr. Below strives to stay ahead of the curve on new techniques and information to better serve his patients. He participates in over 100 hours of continuing education annually and has memberships in organizations like the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry focused on dentistry's future from a scientific and/or esthetic perspective.

Dr. Walter R. Below has practiced in Westlake for over 20 years, receiving his dental degree at the University of Louisville's School of Dentistry in 1981.

He is a Fellow in the Academy of General Dentistry, General Member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, and member of the American Dental Society of Anesthesiology and American Association of Hospital Dentists.

He was a Clinical Instructor in the Department of Periodontics at Case Western Reserve Dental School and on medical staff of Lakewood Hospital.

to partial or full dentures or go through bone grafting and implant procedures to replace the missing teeth.

The Simplest Way to Prevent Tooth Decay

The responsibility for home care rests entirely with the patient. Home care and regular professional care go hand in hand when controlling this disease. Home care is as easy as spending two to

five minutes at least twice daily brushing and flossing. Professional cleanings are not enough to control this chronic disease process. Professional care may initially be required to treat the disease process which would allow the patient to maintain oral hygiene with home care. Both surgical and non-surgical procedures are available to treat this disease and will be discussed at length in following issues.

We provide an expertise for creating smiles that are confident, aesthetic and individualized.

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