

Benefits Spotlight

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5 Dental Warning Signs You Shouldn't Ignore

During your twice yearly dental visits, your dentist takes a careful look inside your mouth to make sure everything looks healthy and any problems are caught as early as possible. But between those visits, it's important you know the signs and symptoms that mean something serious might be going on. When caught early, many dental issues can be fixed before they turn into a larger health problem. Here are five dental warning signs that warrant a call to your dentist.

1. **Bleeding gums:** If you notice that your gums bleed when you brush or floss your teeth, you could be brushing too hard – and that's an easy fix. The more likely culprit, though, is gum disease. Bleeding gums are often red and swollen, which are signs that bacteria is building up and infecting your gum tissue. It's important to talk to your dentist if you have bleeding gums, as they can help clear away the plaque that is contributing to the infection and help you learn how to prevent or even reverse gum disease. Bleeding gums are often the first signs of early stage gum disease (known as gingivitis), but if you let gum disease go untreated, it can lead to severe consequences (which we'll explain in our next point).
2. **Loose teeth:** A telltale sign of advanced gum disease (known as periodontitis) is tooth loss. If you feel a tooth that is not secure in the gum line, you should call your dentist immediately to inspect and treat it. In some cases, loose teeth may also be a sign of osteoporosis, a disease in which bones lose their density and break easier.
3. **Pain in your gums, teeth or jaw:** Pain in your mouth can range from bothersome to excruciating – either way, your dentist should know about it. Mouth pain may be signs of a toothache or gum disease, and your dentist can help treat these so you don't have to suffer through the pain. Jaw pain can mean a lot of things. Stress is a main cause of jaw pain, and understanding how stress is manifesting physically may be the encouragement you need to start putting effort toward managing it. Jaw pain is also considered a symptom of heart attack, so do not wait to talk to your dentist or doctor about getting to the source of your jaw pain.
4. **Bad breath that won't go away:** We all deal with occasional bouts of bad breath after a meal or first thing in the morning, but when it becomes a regular fixture, you should talk to your dentist. It could be connected to other dental health conditions that you'll want to address, including dry mouth, cavities and gum disease. It can also be a sign of a medical problem, such as diabetes, a sinus infection or gastrointestinal issue.

5. **Sores, lumps or discolored patches:** Sores, lumps and white or red patches in and around your mouth or throat that won't go away may be a sign of diabetes, as the condition is associated with delayed healing. This is also a sign of oral cancer, so it's important that you call your dentist to investigate further if you discover these symptoms.

It's important to not ignore these oral health signs, but you can't diagnose the problem alone. Call your dentist if you're experiencing any of these signs or symptoms. If you need help finding an in-network dentist, Delta Dental of Iowa makes it easy. Search for one near you with our online Find a Provider tool or give us a call at the number on the back of your Delta Dental of Iowa ID card.

SOURCES

<https://www.webmd.com/oral-health/oral-warnings>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/dental-oral-health-warning-signs>

Can You Reverse Gum Damage?

Gum disease – also known as periodontal disease – is a common oral health problem. Nearly half of American adults (47.2%) age 30 and older and 70% of those aged 65 and older have some form of it.¹

Your gums are an important protector for your teeth because they surround and support each tooth. But when the gums become infected, they may pull back or recede. Instead of snugly hugging the tooth, infected gums create a pocket around the tooth, which allows bacteria to creep in and infect the area. Ultimately, this could lead to tooth loss because the gums aren't able to adequately support the teeth when they're infected.

If you start noticing that your gums are red, painful, puffy or bleeding, that's a sign to take action to prevent gum disease from getting worse. Fortunately, severe gum disease is preventable with the right treatment. Here's what you need to know to keep your gums healthy.

Gum Disease Basics

Gum disease is caused by a buildup of plaque on your teeth and gums. Daily brushing and flossing helps remove plaque, which is one of the reasons why at-home oral hygiene is so important.

Plaque contains bacteria that can lead to infection. The signs of early stage gum disease (which your dentist may call gingivitis) include red, puffy gums that may bleed. As the infection progresses, the gums may begin to recede – and this allows the bacteria to move deeper toward the tooth root.

Advanced gum disease is called periodontitis. This most severe type of gum disease may lead to tooth loss because the gums are no longer able to help keep the teeth securely in place.

Can You Reverse Gum Damage?

Here's some good news: Gum damage can be reversed, but it requires your dentist's help and strong at-home dental habits.

In some cases, you may not even realize you have early gum disease. This is why it's so important to see your dentist twice a year for preventive dental visits. Your dentist may detect signs of gum disease before you do and provide recommendations on how you can adjust your at-home dental routine to reverse any early damage.

You can also view these dental visits as hitting the reset button for your gums, because your dental team will work to clean your gum line by physically removing the plaque and tartar (tartar is hardened plaque). Removing the plaque and tartar off the gum line will help any infected gum tissue heal.

In some cases, your dentist may recommend a short course of medication to control bacteria and ease gum swelling. If all other non-surgical treatments haven't helped reduce the progression of your gum disease, you may need surgery to remove damaged gum tissue and prevent tooth loss.

In addition to your preventive dental visits, having good at-home habits, such as brushing and flossing twice daily and using an antibacterial mouthwash, will keep plaque from finding a home in your gum line.

Red, Inflamed Gums? It's Time to See Your Dentist

The fact is, if your gums are painful, red, swollen or bleeding, they won't heal with good at-home dental hygiene alone. You'll need to see your dentist to understand the full extent of the gum disease and set the stage for healing to begin.

If you don't have a dentist, Delta Dental of Iowa can help you find an in-network provider near you. Easily search for a dentist online or give us a call at the number on the back of your Delta Dental of Iowa ID card.

REFERENCE:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/conditions/periodontal-disease.html>