

Periodontal Health Throughout a Woman's Life

The changes that women experience throughout life lead to unique health care needs. Since periodontal health is connected to your overall health, as your health care needs change throughout your life- during puberty, pregnancy, and menopause- your oral care needs may change, too.

Hormonal fluctuations during these times may affect your gum tissue and the underlying bone that supports your teeth. These changes may increase your susceptibility to periodontal disease and require you to take special care of your oral health.

Puberty

When a young woman enters puberty, the production of sex hormones, such as progesterone and estrogen, increases. Studies show that these elevated hormone levels may cause an increase in gum sensitivity and lead to a greater inflammatory reaction to any irritation, including food particles and plaque. During this time, the gums can become swollen, turn red, and may feel tender.

Menstruation

During menstruation, some women may experience menstruation gingivitis. This condition presents itself during ovulation or premenstruation and may cause gum bleeding, redness, or swelling of the gums between the teeth, sores on the inside of the lip or cheek, a slight burning sensation, or gum discomfort. Menstruation gingivitis typically occurs right before a woman's period and clears up once her period has started.

These conditions and symptoms tend to lessen as the amount of sex hormones decrease. It is important to maintain oral health during these hormonal fluctuations, including at-

home oral care such as routine tooth brushing and flossing and regular professional dental care, so that the bone and tissues surrounding the teeth are not damaged. In some cases, periodontal treatment may be recommended to ensure that your periodontal health is at its best.

Menopause

If you are menopausal or post-menopausal, you may have noticed a change in the way your mouth looks or feels. You may, for example, experience discomfort in your mouth, including pain, burning sensations in the gum tissue, or mouth sores. Saliva substitutes are available to lessen the effects of a "dry" mouth that some women experience. On rare occasions, a woman may experience menopausal gingivostomatitis. This condition is marked by gums that may look dry or shiny, bleed easily, and range from abnormally pale to deep red.

Research studies have found that post-menopausal women may significantly reduce tooth loss by controlling their periodontal disease. Researchers found that alveolar bone loss (the bone that holds teeth in the mouth) is a strong predictor of tooth loss in post-menopausal women. The health of your teeth depends upon the strength of the alveolar bone holding them in the mouth.

Professional cleanings and diligent at-home care are essential over the course of your entire life- not just during puberty, menstruation years, and menopause. If you experience any of the periodontal symptoms associated with these three stages of life, notify your dental professional, who will create a treatment plan to best manage your unique oral health.



Certain Medications may Affect a Woman's Oral Health

Medications that a woman may take at certain points in her life may impact periodontal health. For instance, birth control pills may make you more susceptible to periodontal health conditions. The synthetic hormones in birth control pills may cause your gums to turn red, bleed, and swell. In addition, some commonly prescribed medications such as antidepressants and certain heart medications may cause dry mouth, increased plaque buildup, or enlarged gum tissue. These conditions can result in bacterial infections under the gum line, which causes bleeding gums and bad breath. Additionally, the inflammatory response to the bacterial infection may increase the risk of other disease. Be sure to let your dental professional know what medications you are taking so your symptoms can be monitored!

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Visit perio.org to assess your risk and for more information on periodontal disease.