

TABLE 9.1 Stages of Periodontal Disease

Stage	Diagnosis	Signs and Symptoms	Treatment
1	Gingivitis	Some swelling and redness of gums. Bleeding. Possible halitosis	Good oral hygiene (brushing and flossing) plus treatment by dental hygienist
2	Slight to moderate periodontitis	Increased redness. Bleeding. Halitosis	Professional scaling and root planning
3	Advanced periodontitis	Redness, swelling and oozing gums. Pain when chewing. Severe halitosis. Tooth loosening	Periodontal surgery plus extensive disinfection of deeper pockets

dental hygienist is also beneficial, particularly where this includes removal of the hardened plaque substance known as tartar or calculus. This latter substance builds up on certain tooth surfaces and acts as a location for bacteria to reside and thus become the focus for continued gingival infection.

Gingivitis is considered mild partly because it can be reversed so readily, and also because it does not result in tooth loss (Fermin and Carranza, 1996). This is due to the fact that it infects only the soft tissue of the gingiva, rather than the alveolar bone.

However, if gingivitis is not treated, it may develop further into the condition known as periodontitis. At this stage, the soft tissue of the gingiva retreats from the base of the tooth to leave spaces known as pockets. Bacteria from the oral plaque can enter these pockets, from where they are difficult to dislodge. Their continued presence in the pockets leads to infection. Once infection occurs, the body's immune system becomes involved, and this is partly responsible for the breakdown of bone and connective tissue below the gumline. This natural response to infection is augmented by toxins produced by the infecting bacteria, and these all accelerate the loss of bone and connective tissue. If left untreated, this will eventually lead to the destruction of the supporting alveolar bone, resulting in the teeth becoming so loose that they are eventually lost altogether.

Periodontal diseases are rare in young children and teenagers, and in general do not develop until patients are at least in their thirties (Lindhe, 1983). It has been estimated that some 48% of adults in the United States have chronic periodontitis and other countries appear to have similar prevalence of the disease (Albandar, 2005). Men appear to be more susceptible to periodontal disease than women for reasons that are not entirely clear.

There are a number of risk factors that increase the chances of developing periodontal diseases, some of which arise from the lifestyle choices of the patient.