Gum Disease
The Dental Information System (D.I.S.) is a series of booklets by the Canadian Dental Association (CDA). The CDA is the national organization of the dental profession. The CDA's goal is that you have the best dental health possible. The D.I.S. can help you reach this goal.

The booklets in the D.I.S. are:
- Bleaching, Bonding and Veneers
- Care After Minor Oral Surgery
- Dental Care for Seniors
- Growing Up...What It Means for Your Child's Dental Health
- Gum Disease
- Orthodontics
- Personal Dental Care
- Restoring and Replacing Your Teeth
- Root Canal Treatment
- Taking Care of Cavities
- The ABCs of Caring for Your Child's Teeth
- The Check-up
- TMD (Temporomandibular Disorders)
- You and Your Dentist — Oral Health Care Partners

To learn even more about your dental health, talk to your dentist. To learn more about the CDA, visit our web site at www.cda-adc.ca.

The CDA would like to thank the following people for their contribution to this edition of Gum Disease:

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Dr. Roger Issa
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Dr. Carol Oakley
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The CDA also thanks:
Dr. Tom Breneman
Dr. Chantal Fortier
Dr. Patricia Main
Dr. John O'Keefe
Dr. Elizabeth Van Huyst

The CDA is grateful to Colgate-Palmolive for its generous support of the D.I.S. Colgate-Palmolive's sponsorship has made this program possible. The D.I.S. booklets are produced and distributed by Canadian Dental Service Plans Inc.
Gum disease is one of the most common dental problems adults face, but gum disease can begin at just about any age. Gum disease often develops slowly and without causing any pain. Sometimes you may not notice any signs until the disease is serious and you are in danger of losing teeth.

The good news is:
• gum disease can almost always be prevented,
• if it starts, it can be treated and
• it can even be turned around (or reversed) in its early stages.

Here’s what you will learn about in this booklet:

- How gum disease happens             page 2
- How to prevent it                     page 4
- Problems that result from it          page 7
- What you can do about it              page 8
Healthy gums and bone hold teeth firmly in place. Gums attach to teeth just below the edge of the gums. Gum disease affects the attachment between gums and teeth.

**Here’s what happens:**

1. Gum disease begins with plaque. Plaque is clear and sticky and contains germs (or bacteria). It forms on your teeth every day. It also forms where your teeth and your gums meet.

2. If plaque is not removed every day by brushing and flossing, it hardens into tartar (also called calculus). Tartar cannot be removed by brushing and flossing. Tartar can lead to an infection at the point where the gums attach to the teeth (called the “point of attachment”). In these early stages, gum disease is called *gingivitis*. Your gums may be a bit red and bleed when you brush, but you may not notice anything.
As gingivitis gets worse, tiny pockets of infection form at the “point of attachment.” You cannot see them, but you may notice puffy gums, traces of blood on your toothbrush, or a change in the colour of your gums. Your gums will probably not be sore.

Over time, the infection breaks down the gum tissue that attaches to the teeth. This is called “attachment loss.” At this point, you will notice swelling, bleeding or colour changes in your gums.

Along with “attachment loss,” gum disease causes the bone that holds your teeth in place to break down too. If gum disease is not treated, teeth become loose and in danger of falling out.