



## FAMILIES AND PERIODONTAL DISEASE

# Achieve optimal oral health in your family

Researchers suggest periodontal disease can pass through saliva. This means that the common contact of saliva in families may put children and couples at risk for contracting the periodontal disease of another family member.

Based on this research, The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) recognizes that treatment of gum disease may involve entire families. If one family member has periodontal disease, the AAP recommends that all family members see a dental professional for a periodontal disease screening.

Parents should also be aware that periodontal disease is not just an adult health problem. In fact, studies indicate that gingivitis is nearly a universal finding in children and adolescents. Gingivitis is the first level of periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is a bacterial gum infection that progresses over time and can become more advanced with age.

To ensure healthy teeth as an adult, good oral health habits

should be established as a child. Parents can encourage good at-home oral health habits in children. For example, parents may want to reward children with visits from the tooth fairy not just when a tooth is lost, but also when a child receives a clean bill of health from the dentist.

Evidence shows that periodontal disease may increase during adolescence due to lack of motivation to practice oral hygiene. Children who maintain good oral health habits through the teen years are more likely to continue brushing and flossing than children who were not taught proper oral care.

Periodontal disease is a leading cause of tooth loss in adults. In addition, research has linked it to more serious health threats such as diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, and pre-term low-birthweight babies.

Periodontists recommend remembering the basics. Replace toothbrushes every few months or

when the bristles begin to look frayed. Floss daily to break up the bacterial colonies between teeth that can cause periodontal disease. And, seek dental care for professional cleanings, as well as screenings for periodontal disease.

Free brochures entitled *Caring For Your Child's Teeth and Gums and Periodontal Diseases: What You Need To Know* are available by calling 1-800-FLOSS-EM or by using the AAP's online request form at [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org).



## Simple tips help ensure healthy smiles

*Your periodontist and his or her staff can give you tips for improving the oral health of your family, including demonstrating proper home care techniques. Here's some additional tips:*

- Know what medications family members are taking and let your dental professionals know about these. Many medications can dry out the mouth, which can cause bad breath and eventually periodontal disease.
- If you're thinking about becoming pregnant, see a periodontist. About a quarter of women of childbearing age have

periodontitis, which can put their unborn babies at risk. In fact, they may be as much as seven times more likely to deliver a premature and underweight baby.

- Monitor your family to see if anyone has the habit of teeth grinding. Grinding can cause cracked or chipped teeth and can increase the risk of developing periodontal disease. Dentists can make custom-fitted night bite guards to prevent teeth grinding at night.
- Up to 30% of the population

may be genetically susceptible to developing severe periodontal disease. Genetic testing could result in the early identification and treatment of at-risk patients.

- Be aware that if your family drinks a lot of bottled water, they may be missing out on the fluoridation that has been added to public water systems for several decades. Children who drink adequately fluoridated water have up to 50 percent fewer cavities than children who do not.

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.

For more information visit [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org)