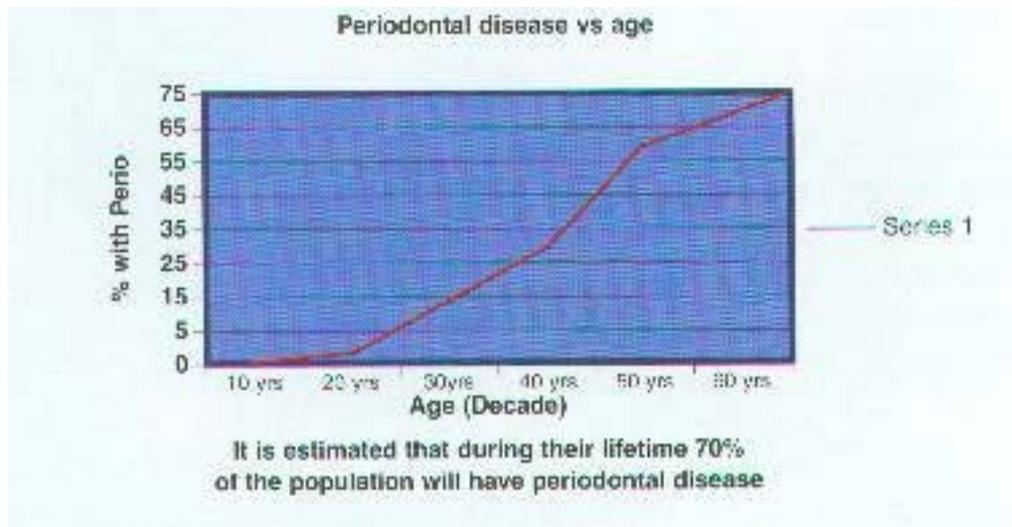


# MANKIND'S Most Prevalent Dangerous Disease Most Prevalent Dangerous Disease

*By John W. Hammer, DDS, FAGD Periodontist*

When asked what is mankind's most prevalent disease, most people would say the common cold. But since colds and similar infectious diseases caused by a temporary infection go away in a few days or a week, probably at any time only one percent of the population has colds. But depending upon age, at any moment over half the population has gum disease since once you get it, it doesn't go away without treatment and according to insurance statistics less than 5% are getting treatment. This is extremely costly to society, because as was shown in the previous article, while no one has been reported to have died because of gum disease directly, it increases the risk for heart disease, stroke cancer, diabetes and a host of the other life threatening diseases.

The initial stage of the gum disease is called Gingivitis while the more advanced stages with deep pocketing and bone loss are called Periodontitis.



## How do we recognize gum disease and why do so many people have it?

It is estimated that during their lifetime 80% of the U.S. population will develop gum disease and that once it starts it does not usually reverse itself without specialized care.

- It begins with the formation of bacterial plaque, a colorless, sticky substance that forms every day. While diligent brushing and flossing will remove it, if left alone, plaque will create chemicals that attack the gums.
- The bacteria cause a mineral buildup called calculus, which advances local irritation. This calculus cannot be removed by diligent brushing and flossing, only by professional care in the dental office.
- The skin on your gums dies and is reborn every day and this tissue contains sulfur. This sulfur mixes with the bacteria and food forming sulfur compounds such as H<sub>2</sub>S (which has a rotten egg smell well-known to chemistry students.) While the symptom is bad breath, the problem is that the sulfur compounds allow the bacteria to penetrate into the gums. (13) (14)
- If your body's defenses are low because of poor nutrition, diseases such as diabetes, hormonal changes, or even natural aging, it will not be able to fight off these attacks.
- Gum tissue and even bone are destroyed forming periodontal pockets, which allow additional harmful bacteria to breed and enter the bloodstream.

The good news is we can combat the onset of periodontal disease through diligent brushing and flossing, using toothpaste and mouthwash that specifically combat anaerobic bacteria and sulfur compounds, and improved nutrition and beneficial supplements. Regular visits to your dentist for preventative care and checkups will support your dental health and let you know if you are at additional risk.

### **Periodontal treatment**

Previously, there were only two forms of periodontal treatment:

1. Soft Tissue maintenance. Normally you can maintain your gums with diligent brushing and flossing. However if deeper pockets are allowed to form (usually taken to be greater than 3mm in depth), your brushing and flossing will not reach deep enough, and it is necessary to return to the dentist every 3 months for deep cleaning. Sometimes topical antibiotics are added to remove the bacteria for some time after the visit.
2. Periodontal surgery. If the pockets continue to deepen and there is too much bone loss the only cure is to visit the periodontist for periodontal surgery and possible bone grafting. A procedure called flap surgery allows the periodontist to have complete access to the root area for deep cleaning. After about a week the incisions will heal and the pockets will have been reduced significantly. Bone grafting, usually using artificial bone can restore much of the lost bone.

This process is not enjoyable and is expensive and therefore it would be beneficial to halt your periodontal disease before this becomes necessary.

New developments have added options to treatment that allow a rapid reduction in pocket depth and home maintenance, without the need for quarterly deep cleanings, and most often avoiding surgery.

These include:

- Lasers to painlessly but effectively kill the bacteria vaporize the diseased tissue and treat the roots to provide better re-growth of attachment and bone.
- Targeted nutritionals to accelerate curing and build up the defense system.
- Specialized toothbrushes to remove food remnants and prevent the buildup of plaque and calculus.
- A Hydrofloss unit to remove food remnants and prevent the buildup of plaque and calculus.
- Special toothpaste and rinse to keep the bacteria and sulfur compounds away daily.
- Our goal is to allow you to play the most important role in staying healthy for life.

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