

**In this brochure:**

- What scaling and root planing is
- Why it is different from regular dental cleanings
- What to expect before, during and after treatment

**ADA Healthy Smile Tips**

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org), the ADA's website just for patients.



*Produced in cooperation with the American Academy of Periodontology*

*Deep pocket photos courtesy of Dr. Neal Nealis, [www.nealnealisdds.com](http://www.nealnealisdds.com).*

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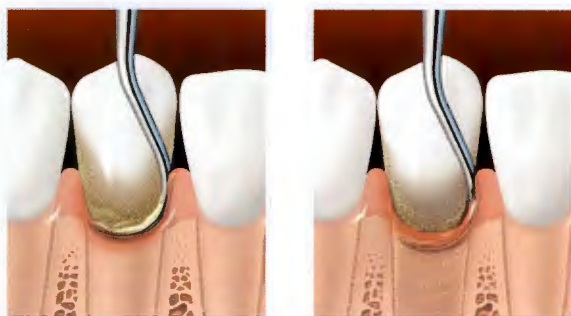
# Scaling and Root Planing

A treatment for gum disease



**ADA** American Dental Association®  
America's leading advocate for oral health

## Scaling and Root Planing



Scaling removes plaque and tartar from below the gum line.

Root planing smooths the tooth root and helps the gums re-attach to the tooth.



**Scaling and root planing is not the same as regular cleanings!** This treatment is a deeper cleaning that focuses on getting your infection and inflammation under control. Be sure to follow all of the recommendations of your dentist, or your gum disease could get worse.



**If you use tobacco in any form, it is important to quit. Smoking, vaping, chewing or dipping can cause problems for your healing process and make it harder for your gum disease to improve. Ask your dentist or physician for information about ways to quit.**

## Care after treatment

### You will have a follow-up visit with your dentist

Another dental visit will be scheduled within a few weeks or months after your last scaling and root planing treatment. At this visit, your dentist or hygienist will look at your gums to see how they have healed. They will measure the periodontal pockets again. If the pockets have gotten deeper and the supporting bone is lost, more treatment may be needed.

Once your periodontal treatment is completed, your dentist may recommend more frequent checkups and cleanings.

Regular dental visits and maintenance care are important to keep your gum disease under control. Depending on your personal case, your appointments may switch between your general dentist and periodontist.

### Keep up with your oral hygiene at home!

Good oral hygiene at home also is very important to help keep gum disease from getting worse or from coming back. Daily home cleaning helps keep plaque under control and reduces tartar buildup.

- Brush your teeth 2 times a day with a toothpaste that contains **fluoride (FLOOR-eyed)**.
- Floss your teeth (or use another between-the-teeth cleaner) once a day.

**BRUSH**  
TWICE A DAY

**FLOSS**  
EVERY DAY

### You don't have to lose teeth to gum disease!

Brush, clean between your teeth, eat a healthy diet and visit your dentist regularly for a lifetime of healthy smiles.



## Checking for gum disease

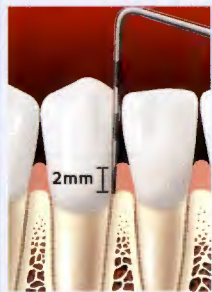
Your dentist or hygienist uses an instrument called a **periodontal probe** to gently measure how deep the pockets are around each tooth. When your teeth are healthy, the pocket depth is usually 3 millimeters (mm) or less.

Usually, the worse the disease, the deeper the pocket — which means bacteria have more room to grow and cause serious damage to your teeth, gums and bone. **Very deep pockets are a sign of advanced periodontal disease.**

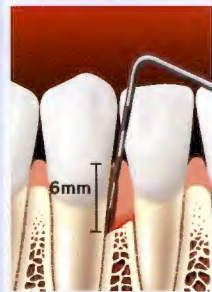
Dental x-rays can be taken to check your teeth and the supporting bone. Bone loss can be a sign of damage from gum disease.

All dentists are trained to detect and treat gum disease. But, your dentist may refer you to a **periodontist (perry-o-DON-tist)** — a dentist who specializes in the treatment of gum disease. A periodontist is also well versed in the surgical treatment of gum disease.

### Periodontal Probe



Periodontal probe of healthy gums.



Periodontal probe showing a pocket forming between the tooth root and the gums.

### X-rays



X-ray showing supporting bone.



X-ray showing periodontal bone loss.

## During treatment

Your gum disease treatment will depend on several factors, including your personal health history and the stage of your gum disease.

The first step in treating gum disease usually involves scaling and root planing. This treatment may be done over more than one visit, depending on your personal needs.

**Scaling:** Your dentist or hygienist removes plaque and tartar down to the bottom of each periodontal pocket.

**Root Planing:** Then, the root surfaces of your teeth are smoothed, or "planed", to allow the gum tissue to heal and reattach to the teeth.

Your dentist or hygienist may recommend certain medicines to help control infection and discomfort or to aid healing. You may be given pills, a mouthrinse or they may place medication directly into the periodontal pocket after the treatment.



This patient has pockets of 8 mm, which is a sign of gum disease. Just like these deep pockets, you may not notice any signs of gum disease on your own.



Scaling and root planing removes plaque and tartar down to the root of the tooth.

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## Periodontal disease is also known as gum disease

**Periodontal** (perry-o-DON-tal) disease is an infection and inflammation that affects the tissues and bone that support your teeth. It's also called **gum disease**.

When your gums are healthy, your gum tissues tightly hug each of your teeth. When you have gum disease, your gums pull away from your teeth. As the gum disease gets worse, the tissues and bones that support your teeth are damaged.

Over time, your teeth may fall out or need to be removed. Treating gum disease in the early stages is very important and can help prevent tooth loss.

This brochure talks about **Scaling (SCAY-ling)** and **Root Planing (PLAY-ning)** — a type of deep cleaning treatment that your dentist may recommend for treating your gum disease.



Plaque that is not removed causes the gums to become red, puffy, and swollen.

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Plaque can harden into tartar if not removed and can build up around your teeth.

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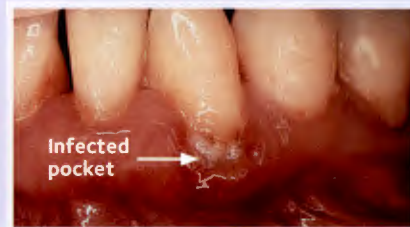
## Before Your Treatment

### Causes of gum disease

**Plaque** is a sticky film that is always on your teeth. Plaque hardens when it's left on your teeth and gums. Hardened plaque is also called **tartar (TAR-ter)**. Bacteria that live in the plaque can cause your body to react and make your gums become inflamed.

When your gums are red, puffy and swollen, they can start to pull away from your teeth. Spaces called pockets start to form between your gums and teeth. These pockets contain more bacteria.

As the bacteria stay in the pockets, your gum disease will get worse. The bacteria in the pockets produce toxins. Your body responds by breaking down the gum tissues and bone around your teeth.



Pockets between your teeth and gums collect bacteria, which can cause them to get infected and inflamed.