What is Gum Disease?

Gum disease is inflammation of the gums that can progress to affect the bone that surrounds and supports your teeth. It is caused by bacteria in plaque, a sticky, colourless film that constantly forms on your teeth. If not removed through daily brushing and flossing, plaque can build up and the bacteria can inflame your gums, eventually extending to underlying tissues and bone that support the teeth. This can cause teeth to become loose, fall out or require extraction by a dentist.

There are two main stages of gum disease:

- **Gingivitis:**
This is the early phase of gum disease, it is inflammation of the gums caused by plaque build-up at the gumline. If daily brushing and flossing do not remove plaque, certain types of bacteria with-in plaque produce toxins (poisons) that can inflame the gum tissue, causing gingivitis. You may notice some bleeding during brushing and flossing. At this early stage in gum disease, damage can be reversed, since the bone and deeper connective tissues that hold the teeth in place are not yet affected.

- **Periodontitis:**
At this stage, the supporting bone and fibres that hold your teeth in place are irreversibly damaged. Your gums may not hold the teeth in place and begin to form a pocket below the gumline, which encourages more plaque to form. Professional gum treatment and improved daily home care can arrest any further damage and help prevent it from returning. In the final stages of gum disease, the fibres and bone supporting your teeth are destroyed to the extent which may cause your teeth to shift or loosen. This can affect how well you can chew your food and severely affected teeth may need to be extracted by your dentist.

How Do I Know if I Have Gum Disease?

Gum disease can occur at any age, but it is most common amongst adults. If detected in its early stages, gum disease can be reversed - so see your dentist if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Gums that are red, puffy or swollen, Gums that bleed during brushing or flossing
- Teeth that look longer because your gums have receded
- Gums that have separated, or pulled away, from the necks of your teeth, creating a pocket
- Changes in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Pus coming from between your teeth and gums
- Persistent bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth

Known risk factors of gum disease?

- Poor oral hygiene
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Genetic predisposition

How is Gum Disease Treated?

- The early stages of gum disease can often be reversed with effective brushing and flossing. Good daily oral hygiene will help keep plaque from building up.

- Professional cleaning by your dental professional is the only way to remove plaque that has built up and hardened into tartar. Your dental professional will clean or "scale" your teeth to remove the tartar above and below the gumline. If your gum condition is more severe, you may require surgery. Remember, after successful treatment, you still need to take extra care of your gums to make sure gum disease doesn't come back. Your dentist will advise you on how best to look after your gums before, during and after treatment.

  By scheduling regular check ups, early stages of gum disease can be treated before they lead to a more severe condition. Please note smoking can make gum disease worse. It reduces any bleeding from gums, whilst gum disease continues, so you may miss the first signs of any problems.

Healthy Gums - Healthy gums are firm and don't bleed. They fit snugly around individual teeth.

Gingivitis - Gums are inflamed, may appear red or swollen and may bleed during brushing

Periodontitis - Gums begin to separate and recede from the teeth. This allows plaque to move toward the roots, affecting supporting deeper tissues and bone.

Following successful treatment of moderate to severe gum disease, you are likely to experience tooth sensitivity, gum recession and larger spaces in between your teeth and in some cases tooth mobility. This is due to the infected and inflamed gums healing back to the level of the bone which has often been lost from the pre-existing disease.Any discomfort normally reduces over time and the interdental spaces must be regularly cleaned by the patient and by regular visits to the hygienist. Gum disease cannot always be fully cured but managed and stabilised through appropriate treatment and management of highlighted risk factors.

Patient signature to confirm information provided: …………………………………………………………………….

Date: …………………………………………………………………..........