

Do Your Teeth Bleed When You Brush? What You Need to Know

People sometimes believe that bleeding when brushing is normal. They say that their gums always bleed and so do their other family member's. Are bleeding gums normal?

The short answer is No. Healthy gums do not bleed with brushing or flossing. In fact, bleeding gums is a sign of gingivitis, which is an early stage of gum and bone (periodontal) disease. If you watch TV, you have heard of gingivitis. A multimillion-dollar industry surrounds various types of products that are purported to eliminate gingivitis. The problem is, most of the products don't really work. They can make your mouth "feel" clean, but the source of the gingivitis remains. Here's what you need to know:

- Gingivitis is caused from an inflammation of the gum tissues. This inflammation can be from caused from a bacterial infection or some other type of irritation. It is known that there are at least 11 different strains of bacteria that can cause gum and bone disease. These bacteria thrive in dark, moist areas, such as the gum tissues around the teeth. Our immune systems recognize that there is a problem and send out cells to get rid of the bacteria. Blood to the infected area is also increased to help flush away the invaders. However, if the invaders don't go, our tissues become engorged with blood and our gums can bleed when we brush.
- Bleeding is sometimes the "first alert" to more damaging problems arising. Because gum and bone disease can exist in the absence of other noticeable symptoms, bleeding may be the only sign a person notices; until some destruction of bone has already occurred.
- Brushing with a soft bristle brush or a soft bristle "power" brush and using dental floss can reduce plaque, which is a soft, sticky substance that forms on our teeth. Plaque is a breeding ground for bacteria.
- Prescription products, such as medicinal mouth rinses and pastes can help. These provide ingredients known to reduce bacteria.
- Professional cleaning or prophylaxis, where the dentist or hygienist removes plaque, calculus (also known as tartar-a hard deposit), and stains also reduces bacteria.
- If bleeding continues, or if you have "pockets" that are 4mm or deeper around any of your teeth, root planing may be needed. Root planing is not the same as a professional cleaning. It is a more extensive procedure to rid the teeth of germs and deposits.
- Since bleeding gums may be the first sign of a mouth infection, and since infections in the mouth are related to many chronic illness, such as diabetes and heart disease, a mouth infection is nothing to ignore.

There are sometimes other serious reasons for gums that bleed. These include blood disorders, clotting disorders, liver problems, kidney disorders, artery or capillary diseases, and diabetes and heart problems. Bleeding gums can also be the result of vitamin C and K deficiencies. Fungal infections are implicated with bleeding tissues, as well as certain medications such as aspirin and blood thinners.

What should you look for?

- Bleeding gum tissue upon brushing or flossing
- Red, tender or swollen gums
- A bad taste in the mouth
- Recession of gums from the teeth
- Sensitive teeth,
- Bad breath

If you have any of these symptoms, your dentist and hygienist can help. Despite the fact that many people think that gums that bleed are normal, we know that they are not.

Call us if you want to know more. We are always happy to help!