

Root Planing/Curettage

What is gum disease?

Gum disease is a complex condition affecting the gums and bone supporting your teeth. Several factors contribute to it, including family history, smoking and chronic diseases such as diabetes.

It begins with plaque, a soft, sticky substance that builds up on your teeth. Plaque is mostly made up of bacteria, which feed on sugar from food and drink. Tartar, formed by hardened plaque, helps plaque to gather and makes it harder to remove.

If plaque is allowed to build up, the bacteria in it can make your gum sore and infected; they will look red and puffy, and they will probably bleed when you brush your teeth.

The gum will then start to become detached from the tooth, forming 'pockets' in which plaque can gather and bone supporting the tooth will slowly be lost. Because this process is usually painless, it can become very bad without you noticing. If left unchecked, gum disease will lead to the loss of teeth.

What is root planing/curettage?

Root planing is a way of helping to halt gum disease. It involves 'deep' scaling, to clean parts of teeth below the gum line, which cannot be reached with a toothbrush. Root planing cleans out the pockets, and removes plaque and tartar from the tooth roots.

What does the dentist or dental hygienist do?

Dentists and hygienists use two types of instrument for root planing:

- Hand scalers come in different sizes and shapes to reach different parts of the teeth. This is why you will see the dentist or hygienist changing instruments quite often.
- Electric scalers use a tip that vibrates very fast in a stream of water. The water is removed from your mouth using a small suction device. A hand scaler is also used along with an electric scaler, to check whether the roots are completely clean.

After a tooth has been root planed, the pocket should, make the gum sit closer to the tooth. You then need to be especially careful about cleaning the tooth above the gum line. Root planning will probably need to be repeated regularly.

Root planing takes longer than a normal scale and polish, and is often done under a local anaesthetic. Your mouth might be treated in sections, at more than one visit.

Points to remember:

- Root planing can help stop gum disease becoming worse and prevent tooth loss.
- Like scale and polishing, root planing helps to keep your teeth and gums clean at home.
- To reduce the risk of your gum disease progressing, do not smoke, and eat a healthy, balanced diet .
- Dentists and dental hygienists cannot keep your mouth healthy by themselves. Your own cleaning is the key.