

Plaque

What is dental plaque?

Plaque is a colorless film that is constantly forming in the mouth. It is made up of a combination of bacteria, saliva and acids that form into a sticky deposit -- adhering to the teeth. Plaque can irritate the gums and the acids can destroy the tooth's enamel surface -- causing holes or cavities. When plaque isn't removed, it turns into calculus and tarter. Tarter is too difficult for an individual to remove via at-home cleaning and will often need to be removed via a professional cleaning.

What is a "Plaque Attack?"

A "plaque attack" occurs when sugar and acids in the mouth begin to dissolve the enamel on the tooth and starts to decay.

How can you prevent plaque?

Good oral hygiene -- including brushing at least twice a day and flossing -- and regular check-ups with the dentist will help eliminate plaque and tooth decay. Dentists also recommend eating nutritiously and limiting the number of between-meal snacks.

Who is affected by plaque?

Plaque affects those as young as six months who are just getting their primary teeth, and it continues to form in your mouth until you die.

What if plaque is not removed?

If plaque is not removed, it can lead to periodontal disease (gum disease). The two most common forms of gum disease are gingivitis and adult periodontitis. Gingivitis is an inflammation or infection of the gums (gingiva) and it is an early stage of periodontal disease. Gums become red, inflamed and swollen. If not treated, gingivitis may progress to adult periodontitis, a more serious stage of gum disease, that can lead to tooth loss.

When should you contact a dentist?

The Chicago Dental Society recommends visiting a dentist at least every six months for a cleaning and a thorough examination. If you experience any problems with your gums or teeth, you should consult a dentist immediately.