

# Root surface debridement (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 film 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 due to inadequate toothbrushing, the bacteria in it can make your gums 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 surface debridement (planing/curettage)?

Root planing is an additional therapy provided by dentists, hygienists or dental therapists, as an adjunct to a careful toothbrushing regime at home, to halt the progression of gum disease. This treatment will not be effective unless you are also cleaning your teeth well yourself. It involves 'deep' scaling, to clean parts of teeth below the gumline, 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, dental hygienist or dental therapist do?

Dentists, hygienists and dental therapists 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 shrink, making the gum sit closer to the tooth. You then need to be especially careful about cleaning the teeth above the gumline. Root planing 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.
- *Because swollen gums shrink as they heal following treatment, gums may recede, showing more tooth and sometimes resulting in sensitivity which can usually be controlled with toothpaste for sensitivity.*
- Like scaling and polishing, root planing helps you 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.