Gum disease can strike at any age: NetWellness

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I am in my 30s and have always thought that gum disease was mostly a problem for older people, so I was very surprised when my dentist told me that I have early stage gingivitis. I brush and floss regularly -- how can this be?

Gum disease strikes all ages with four out of five adults and nearly all children and adolescents have some form of this oral health problem.

In fact, periodontal or gum disease is the No. 1 cause of tooth loss and has become an important oral health concern similar to tooth decay. Even more concerning, new research shows that gum disease is linked to other health problems including heart and respiratory diseases, preterm and low birthweight babies, stroke, osteoporosis, and diabetes.

Certain populations, such as Mexican-Americans and African-Americans, are at higher risk of developing periodontal disease. Additionally, 30 percent of us or about one in three people may be genetically susceptible and develop severe forms of periodontal disease in
spite of using good oral hygiene.

This is a disease primary caused by bacteria. So if you clean your mouth more routinely, you control the daily bacterial load better.

However, whether or not you develop gum disease also depends on what type of bacteria you are carrying. Some bacteria are really toxic, and they do not have to be high in numbers to cause damage. In addition, damage is determined in large part by how the body responds to this bacterial challenge.

Some of us develop hyper-responsiveness to a small bacterial challenge, and this response is the main reason that we have severe tissue loss even with fairly good oral hygiene.

Many people don't realize that they have this serious infection. It's important to ask your dentist about your periodontal health. Treating gum disease early can help you keep your teeth for a lifetime.

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