“Floss following festive fowl,” says Madoc’s dental Ben

Gum Disease
The most common disease afflicting people today is gum disease. The scientific term for gum disease is periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is a general term that includes a large list of different ailments that affect the components responsible for supporting the teeth in the mouth.

The components include the thin lining of cementum tenaciously attached to the tooth’s root surface, the bone surrounding the tooth’s root (also referred to as the periodontal bone), the fine (periodontal) ligament suspended between the bone and cementum, and the pinkish-red gum (or gingiva) covering the structure.

When any part of the periodontal apparatus is damaged because of inflammation then a periodontal disease is diagnosed by the dentist. Periodontal disease is diagnosed further into either a gingivitis or a periodontitis.

A gingivitis is a periodontal disease that affects only the gingiva without damaging the other three supporting structures of the periodontium: the cementum, the periodontal bone and the periodontal ligaments. These diseases are described as an inflammation (i.e.,itis) of the gingiva, and thus its name, gingivitis.

The most common form of gingivitis is the gingivitis caused by an individual’s immune response to bacteria in plaque buildup on the teeth above the gum line. The plaque acts as a constant irritant to the gingiva causing it to become infected and inflamed.

Periodontal pockets are the infected space between the root and gum that a periodontal probe can penetrate into. The deeper the probe can penetrate the deeper the pocket and thus the greater the risk the area has to house.

At this stage, there is no cure for periodontal disease, be that a gingivitis or a periodontitis. In most cases, continued periodontal treatment proves to be reliable and effective at halting the disease from progressing.

Professional scaling and prophylaxis in conjunction with regular home care oral hygiene (daily brushing and flossing) is the most cost-effective method of treating and managing periodontal disease.

Antibiotics are effective since periodontal disease is a bacterial infection. They are used routinely on the more aggressive forms of periodontal disease such as trench mouth and juvenile periodontitis.

Mouth rinses, such as Listerine® and… the chlorhexidine base mouth rinses, have shown to be effective at managing gingivitis but not periodontitis. This is because the rinses to not adequately diffuse deep into the periodontal pockets where the periodontitis causing bacteria live.

Periodontal surgery is recommended in those cases where periodontal pockets are so deep that brushing and flossing cannot adequately keep the pockets free of plaque.

It has already been said that periodontitis is irreversible. Yet new therapies that include specially placing materials and medication into the diseased area are rejuvenating the growth of lost supporting cementum, periodontal ligaments and bone.

Initial results are promising for certain situations.

Yet with all the advances in the understanding of periodontal disease and therapies available, it is important to floss daily and have regular checkups to maintain good oral health.
Another well-known gingivitis, although not as destructive as the bacterial plaque gingivitis just described, is known as "Trench Mouth." The correct clinical term is Acute Necrotizing Ulcerative Gingivitis or more commonly referred to as ANUG. This type of gingivitis was first described amongst the soldiers fighting in the trenches during World War I, hence the name. The cause of Trench Mouth is associated with numerous stress-related situations. It is an exaggerated response to specific type of bacterial plaque that normally does not cause any problem in the stress-free individual. Trench Mouth is classically presented with very painful ulcerative gingiva, sloughing of the superficial lining of the gingiva combined with a strong metal taste and bad breath.

Other types of gingivitis are caused by certain medications, like cancer chemotherapy, and other medical conditions, like pregnancy. Although gingivitis is an annoying disease, it is completely reversible when properly treated. On the other hand, if periodontitis is an irreversible loss of the supporting structures. The culprit in this case, is the individual's immune response to the bacterial plaque that live below the gum line (as opposed to "above the gum line" in the case of gingivitis).

The most common type of periodontitis is "Adult Periodontitis." It is a chronic, slowly progressive disease that destroys the periodontal ligament and eventually the bone that supports the teeth. In many cases, a breakdown of the underlying bone will result in a recession of the gums and loosening of the teeth. Periodontal pockets form and may become infected, causing pain and swelling.

Yet, with all the advances in understanding and treatment of periodontal disease over the last two decades, the traditional professional cleaning complemented with effective routine brushing and flossing continues to be the best defense toward periodontal disease.

Safety is everyone's concern!

In 1991, seniors from Hastings and Prince Edward Counties spent 16,511 days in hospital as a result of falls. Falls are the leading cause of injury and the sixth leading cause of death in persons over the age of 65. Nearly 600 Ontarians over 65 died annually as a result of falling.

Because falls often result in broken bones, the impact of mobility while fractures heal can lead to losses in muscle tone and balance that eventually result in loss of independence. Further impediments in mobility may affect other body systems such as circulation; serious problems can cause leading to hospitalization; and, unfortunately, sometimes death. Therefore, it is very important that each person exercise caution and common sense.

A local group of service providers and interested persons are working together to increase public awareness of the size of the problem and the causes of the falls. The group will also be developing ways to help prevent falls in co-operation with individuals and groups in the community.

The group—Coalition for the Prevention of Falls by Seniors—was organized by the Healthy Senior Program of the Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Health Unit and the District Health Council. It has members from numerous social agencies as well as concerned, interested individuals. If you are interested in joining the coalition or would like additional information, please call 906-5500 and leave a message for Julie Rivers, Public Health Nurse, Healthy Seniors Program.