

What can cause gum pain?

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Causes Treatment Home remedies Prevention When to see a dentist Summary

The gums are soft, fleshy tissue that support and protect the teeth. Gum pain can be a sign of irritation, infection, or injury to the gums and teeth.

Gum pain can often be a temporary symptom, but other times a person may require dental treatment to prevent further health complications.

In this article, we discuss some of the possible causes of gum pain. We also cover treatment, home remedies, prevention of gum pain, and when to see a dentist.

Causes

Gum pain can range from a minor irritation to severe and debilitating. Some potential causes of gum pain include:

- **Canker sores:** These are small, painful ulcers that can occur on the gums. Causes of canker sores can include emotional stress, mouth injuries, an impaired immune system, or other underlying health conditions.



- **Cuts or injuries:** Food and objects that enter the mouth can sometimes cause minor cuts or injuries to the gums and teeth. A person may also accidentally bite down on the gums, which can sometimes cause pain and bleeding. Usually, gum pain is temporary, but it can be the result of infection.
- **Gum disease:** Also known as gingivitis, this condition occurs when bacteria build up under the gums and cause inflammation and bleeding. Without treatment, gingivitis can develop into periodontitis and lead to loose teeth. People who smoke are at a higher risk for gum disease than nonsmokers.
- **Hormonal changes:** Hormonal fluctuations, especially during pregnancy, can cause a person to experience swelling, pain, and bleeding in the gums.
- **Improper flossing or brushing techniques:** Brushing or flossing too vigorously or frequently can sometimes cause the gums to bleed and be painful.
- **Sinusitis:** A bacterial or viral infection in the sinuses can cause swelling of the sinus cavity. Some people with sinusitis also experience gum pain and toothache.
- **Tooth abscess:** A bacterial infection in the root of a tooth can cause an abscess or pus-filled sac. Tooth abscesses can lead to gum swelling and pain. They can also be serious and spread to other parts of the body, so it is essential to see a dentist quickly.

Treatment

Treatment for gum pain depends upon the underlying cause.

For people with gum disease, for example, a dentist may recommend professional cleaning to remove plaque and tartar from the gums. They may also prescribe an antibacterial mouthwash, such as one containing alcohol or chlorhexidine, to kill excess bacteria and prevent the future build up of plaque.

If a person has severe gum disease, a dentist may recommend surgery to repair bone or gum loss that the condition has caused. Sometimes, this can include bone and tissue grafting to encourage the growth of new, healthy tissue.

People with tooth abscesses may require root canal treatment. During this procedure, a dentist will remove the infected pulp, or soft tissue inside the tooth, and the abscess from the root and then repair and seal the damaged tooth.

Gum pain due to sinusitis usually lessens once the infection clears up. For bacterial infections, a doctor may prescribe antibiotics.

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Home remedies

People with gum pain that they cannot explain should see their dentist for a checkup. However, some simple home remedies may help relieve the discomfort. These include:

- **Gargling salt water.** A person can prepare a gargle by mixing 1 teaspoon of salt with 8 ounces of warm water.
- **Clove oil.** Applying clove oil to gums can reduce pain and swelling.
- **Pain medication.** Over-the-counter pain relievers, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, can help to reduce gum pain.
- **Brushing carefully.** Brush sore, swollen, or bleeding areas of the gums gently.



A person should avoid eating citrus fruit when they have sore gums.

Avoiding foods that can irritate or scratch the gums may also help while they are healing. Examples include:

- acidic foods, such as citrus fruits and tomatoes
- sharp or scratchy foods, such as chips, nuts, or pretzels
- spicy foods, such as those containing chilis or other hot peppers

For people with canker sores, taking vitamin and mineral supplements, such as iron and vitamin B-12, may help reduce gum pain.

Prevention

Good oral hygiene can help prevent gum pain and other dental issues. This includes:

- brushing teeth twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste for at least 2 minutes
- flossing once daily
- using a dental mouthwash daily
- having regular checkups with a dentist, such as every 6 months

If a person stops smoking, this can also improve gum health. Smoking can reduce blood flow to the gums, which may impair healing and lead to discomfort.

When to see a dentist

It is advisable for people with severe, persistent, or recurring gum pain to see a dentist for a checkup.

A dentist can examine the gums, teeth, and mouth for signs of infection, tooth decay, and other dental issues.

A person may also want to consider seeing a dentist if the pain occurs alongside any of the following symptoms:

- bad breath that does not improve with tooth brushing
- bleeding gums
- gums that are receding
- loose teeth
- pain when chewing
- red gums
- sensitive teeth



A dentist can check for signs of infection and tooth decay.

Summary

There are many possible causes of gum pain, including gum disease, infections, abscesses, and ulcers.

People with gum pain they cannot explain may wish to consider seeing a dentist for a checkup. Without treatment, some causes of gum pain can lead to tooth decay or tooth loss.

Home remedies for gum pain include applying clove oil to gums, rinsing the mouth with salt water, and avoiding irritating foods.

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