

**COOLEYSMILES**  
*GENERAL & COSMETIC DENTISTRY*  
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### ***Scaling and Root Planing***

Periodontal disease (also known as gum disease or pyorrhea) is an infection of the gum and bone that hold the teeth in place. It is often painless and you may not be aware that you have a problem until your gums and the supporting bone are seriously damaged. The good news is that periodontal disease can be treated in the early stage with scaling and root planing.

During a checkup, the dentist and hygienist examine your gums for periodontal problems. An instrument called a periodontal probe is used to measure the depth (in millimeters) of the spaces between your teeth and gums. At the edge of the gum line, healthy gum tissue forms a very shallow, V-shaped groove (called the sulcus) between the tooth and gums. The normal sulcus depth should be 3 millimeters or less. With periodontal disease, the sulcus develops into a pocket that collects more plaque (bacteria) and is difficult to keep clean.

If gum disease is diagnosed, your dentist may provide treatment or you may be referred to a periodontist, a dentist who specializes in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of periodontal disease. Treatment often depends on how far the condition has progressed and how well your body responds to therapy.

### ***Prevention and Treatment***

Prevention includes a good daily oral hygiene routine. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and cleaning between teeth once a day with floss or another interdental cleaner help prevent plaque from forming. Regular dental checkups and cleanings are important.

Scaling and root planning (commonly referred to as “deep cleaning” is a method of treating periodontal disease when pockets are greater than 3mm. Scaling is used to remove plaque and tartar (calcified plaque) beneath the gum line. A local anesthetic may be given to reduce any discomfort. Using an instrument called a scaler or ultrasonic cleaner, the dentist or hygienist carefully removes the plaque and tartar down to the bottom of each periodontal pocket. The tooth’s root surfaces then are smoothed or planed; this allows the gum tissue to heal. The smoother surfaces also make it more difficult for plaque to accumulate along the root surfaces.

Your dentist may recommend, prescribe and administer medications to help control infection and pain or to facilitate healing. At a follow-up you appointment, the dentist or hygienist checks how the gums have healed and how the periodontal pockets have decreased. When pockets greater than 3mm persist after treatment, additional measures, such as surgical therapy may be needed.

You’ll be given instructions on how to care for your healing teeth and gums. Maintaining good oral hygiene and continued, sometimes lifelong, follow-up by your dentist are essential to help prevent periodontal disease from becoming more serious or recurring.

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***Patients Instructions Following Scaling and Root Planing***

Your oral hygiene will determine the type of healing response that occurs in your mouth. On the day of scaling and root planing, gently brush around the gum line. Start flossing the day after the procedure is done. Tenderness when brushing and flossing may last for several days. Thorough plaque removal must be accomplished and will help reduce tenderness and sensitivity.

Maintaining an adequate diet is essential to ensure proper healing. There is no restriction regarding diet, but be careful of foods that can get lodged between the gums and tooth (i.e. popcorn, nuts, chips, etc.) Smoking and the heat it produces can irritate the gums, retarding the healing response. It is advisable to not smoke for a few days following the scaling and root planing in order to insure proper healing.

The majority of patients experience an uneventful post-operative healing period, yet please be aware of the following potential side-effects.

1. Bleeding: Slight bleeding and tissue irritation following the procedure for the first few days is not unusual.
2. Tooth sensitivity: varying degrees of root sensitivity following the scaling and root planing can occur. This can result from exposure to cold and or hot air and liquids, sweet, salty, spicy and or acidic foods, as well as mechanically from brushing and flossing. In most individuals this sensitivity will last a few weeks before gradually subsiding.
3. Gum sensitivity: discomfort following scaling and root planing varies from patient to patient. Usually ibuprofen or acetaminophen (Advil, Motrin, Tylenol) taken as directed will relieve any discomfort. Warm salt water rinses (1 tsp. salt to 8 ounces water) every 6 hours for the first few day will aid in healing irritated areas.