When Do You Need a Deep Dental Cleaning? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/need-deep-dental-cleaning/

Details:

You may need a deep dental cleaning if you notice a hard, whitish or yellowish build-up along your gum line that does not go away with brushing and flossing. Other signs include swollen, red or bleeding gums, and gum pockets that you cannot clean at home. Deep dental cleaning, also called root planing, is a procedure that aims to improve and maintain the health of your gums, not only your teeth. At Core Dental we start with an examination, because only a dentist or hygienist can confirm whether it suits you.

What are the signs that you may need a deep dental cleaning?

Signs that may point to a need for deeper cleaning include:

a hard, white or yellowish substance along the gum line that does not go away with brushing and flossing

swelling or redness of the gums

gums that bleed when you brush or floss

signs of gingivitis

gum pockets, which are gaps between the tooth and gum that brushing and flossing cannot reach

These signs can also have other causes, so please do not diagnose yourself. Our dentists and hygienists can measure your gums, check for tartar and recommend the right treatment for you.

What is the difference between a regular clean and a deep dental cleaning?

A regular teeth clean removes plaque from the teeth to help prevent cavities and keep the breath fresh. It happens at home, through brushing and flossing, and at the dentist or hygienist, through scaling.

When plaque is left undisturbed by brushing or flossing, it can harden into calculus, also called tartar. Tartar is firmly attached to the teeth and cannot be removed by brushing or flossing. Plaque tends to build up mostly along the gum line, so it can eventually irritate and infect the gum. This early stage is known as gingivitis. Symptoms of gingivitis include swollen, red gums that may bleed.

If gingivitis is left untreated, it can progress in the long term to gum disease (periodontal disease). A feature of gum disease is the formation of pockets between the tooth and the surrounding gum. Because these pockets cannot be reached by brushing or flossing, bacteria can sit in them undisturbed. Untreated gum disease is associated with bone loss and, in turn, tooth loss. It is recognised as a major cause of tooth loss in adults.

In contrast to a regular clean, which focuses on the teeth, deep dental cleaning is designed to improve or maintain the health of the gums. You can read more about what a hygiene appointment involves .

What is another name for deep dental cleaning?

Deep dental cleaning is also known as root planing. It is a specialised procedure designed to improve and maintain gum health. Your dentist or hygienist may describe it as scaling and root planing.

What does a deep dental cleaning involve?

There are two main steps.

Scaling. As with a regular clean, the first step is to remove tartar from the teeth, because tartar is often at the root of gum problems.

Root planing. The second step involves cleaning the surface of the tooth root. This means reaching into the gum pockets to remove the bacteria that cause inflammation and can contribute to bone loss. Because these pockets can be quite deep, the process is called deep dental cleaning.

Our clinicians explain each step before they begin, so you know what to expect. You can read more about what treatment of gum disease involves .

Will you be numbed during a deep dental cleaning?

The procedure can cause sensitivity, so your mouth is numbed with local anaesthetic before treatment to keep you comfortable. It is generally not advisable to numb the whole mouth at once, because this makes speaking and eating difficult. Usually one quarter of the mouth, or occasionally half, is treated in each visit. That means you may need more than one appointment, and your clinician will tell you how your treatment plan is likely to be staged. Some people notice tenderness or sensitivity for a few days afterwards, and it is worth asking what aftercare suits you.

How can you keep your gums healthy after treatment?

Deep cleaning is part of a longer plan, not a one-off fix. Gum health depends on the daily care you give your teeth and on regular review. In general, it helps to:

brush gently twice a day with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste

clean between your teeth every day

book regular check-ups and hygiene visits at the interval your clinician recommends

let us know if you smoke, have diabetes or take medicines that affect your mouth, because these can influence gum health

Review intervals should be tailored to your own oral-health risks rather than assumed to be the same for everyone.

When should you see a dentist about your gums?

A sensible first step is a consultation with a dentist, who can diagnose the cause of any trouble and talk you through your treatment options. A useful first step is to explain your concern, symptoms and goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. We can then assess your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, take images when it is clinically appropriate and explain which options may suit you.

You may like to ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, what aftercare involves and what risks or limitations apply. A written treatment plan can help you compare stages, expected appointments and payment arrangements before you proceed. If you have uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, a serious facial injury or another life-threatening symptom, call 000 immediately. For severe tooth pain or swelling without those

signs, contact your dental practice promptly.

What the published advice actually says a professional clean removes

"Deep cleaning" is a phrase patients hear rather than a term the published sources use, so it is worth setting out precisely what the state health advice does and does not say about it. The honest answer is narrower than most descriptions, and the narrowness is informative.

The Victorian Department of Health, on what a practitioner contributes to gum disease: "they can also professionally remove plaque and hardened plaque (calculus). This helps the gums to attach back to the tooth."

That is the whole of it. Two substances — plaque, and plaque that has hardened into calculus — and one stated purpose: letting the gum reattach to the tooth.

Note what the Department does not do. It does not name a procedure, describe scaling or root planing, specify instruments, give a number of appointments, or state a pocket depth at which treatment becomes necessary. We are not going to fill those gaps with figures, because they would not be coming from the source. What your own treatment involves depends on an examination, and we will explain it then.

What the source does explain is why the need arises, and that part is genuinely useful.

Calculus is "hardened plaque" — it is not removable by brushing, which is the straightforward reason a professional clean is not simply a more enthusiastic version of what you do at home.

And once gum disease has progressed, there is a physical space involved. The Department describes how "when the seal of the gum is damaged by gum disease, spaces can form between the tooth root and the gum. These spaces are called 'periodontal pockets'. Bacteria get trapped in these pockets and cause even more damage to the periodontium. Over time, bone is damaged and lost, and larger spaces or pockets begin to form between the tooth and the gum."

A pocket shelters the bacteria that deepen it. That is why cleaning below the gum line becomes a clinical task rather than a matter of brushing harder — and brushing harder is not the answer in any case.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 1 August 2025; accessed 4 November 2026).

What it can achieve, and what it cannot

This is the part of the conversation where expectations are either set properly or set wrongly, so we would rather be plain about it.

What the source claims. Removing plaque and calculus "helps the gums to attach back to the tooth". And, for the advanced stage: "early treatment of periodontitis can save affected teeth."

What the source does not claim. There is no statement anywhere on the page that periodontitis is reversible. Compare the two stages as the Department writes them. Of gingivitis: "the good news is that gingivitis can be reversed." Of periodontitis: nothing equivalent — only that early treatment "can save affected teeth".

That asymmetry is deliberate and it matters. At the gingivitis stage, where "there is no damage to the deeper parts of the gums, teeth or bone", the realistic aim is a return to healthy gums. Once bone has been "damaged and lost", the aim is to stop further loss and keep the teeth. Bone that has gone is not something the published advice says a clean restores.

So if you have been told you need a deep clean, the useful questions are: which stage am I at, what is the aim for my own teeth, and what has to continue at home afterwards? The last one is not a formality — plaque is "constantly being formed", so a professional clean is a reset rather than a cure, and the Department's prevention list still applies the next day.

The threshold for getting looked at , if you are reading this because your gums bleed: keep brushing with a soft brush, and "if your gums do not improve or if they keep bleeding after four weeks, see your oral health professional." Do not wait the four weeks if you have receding gums, loose or shifted teeth, tenderness when biting, bad breath or a bad taste — those are listed signs of the advanced stage.

The Department's own summary of the stakes is worth ending on: "getting treatment early can help save teeth affected by gum disease." Call us on 13 13 16 and we will arrange an examination.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 1 August 2025; accessed 4 November 2026).

Frequently asked questions

Is deep dental cleaning the same as root planing?

Yes, the two terms are generally used for the same procedure. It combines scaling to remove tartar with cleaning of the tooth root surface under the gum, to remove bacteria that cause inflammation.

Does a deep dental cleaning hurt?

Your mouth is numbed before treatment, so you should be comfortable during the procedure. Some people feel tenderness or sensitivity afterwards. Tell your clinician if you feel any discomfort during treatment and they can adjust.

How many visits does a deep dental cleaning take?

It depends on your gums. Usually one quarter of the mouth, or occasionally half, is treated at each visit, so more than one appointment is common. Your clinician will explain the plan after examining you.

Can bleeding gums be treated without a deep clean?

Sometimes. Early gingivitis may improve with a professional clean and better home care. Gum pockets and tartar below the gum line may need deeper cleaning. Only an examination can show which applies to you.

Can tartar be removed at home?

No. Once plaque has hardened into tartar, brushing and flossing cannot remove it, and it needs to be removed by a dentist or hygienist. Daily brushing and cleaning between the teeth help prevent new build-up.

What does a professional clean remove that brushing cannot?

Hardened plaque. The Victorian Department of Health's description is that a practitioner "can also professionally remove plaque and hardened plaque (calculus)", and that this "helps the gums to attach back to the tooth". Calculus is not removable by brushing, which is why this is a clinical task rather than a matter of brushing harder.

Is there a pocket depth at which treatment becomes necessary?

Not one that is published. The Department describes periodontal pockets and the bone loss that follows, but gives no measurement and no threshold — so we will not quote a figure in millimetres. What applies to your own teeth comes from an examination.

Will a deep clean reverse my gum disease?

That depends on the stage, and the source is carefully different about each. Of the early stage it says "the good news is that gingivitis can be reversed". Of periodontitis it says only that "early treatment of periodontitis can save affected teeth" — there is no claim that it reverses. Where bone has been "damaged and lost", the aim is to stop further loss.

Why would cleaning below the gum line need a clinician?

Because of the space involved. The Department explains that when the gum's seal is damaged, "spaces can form between the tooth root and the gum", called periodontal pockets, and that "bacteria get trapped in these pockets and cause even more damage". A pocket shelters the bacteria that deepen it, and a toothbrush does not reach into one.

Is a professional clean a one-off fix?

No. Plaque is, in the Department's words, "constantly being formed" by bacteria feeding on dietary sugars, so a clean is a reset rather than a cure. Its prevention advice — brushing twice a day along the gum line, cleaning between the teeth daily, cleaning dentures daily — applies again the next morning.

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Dental hygiene

Dental check-up

What does a hygiene appointment involve?

What does treatment of gum disease involve?

How to keep your gums healthy

Why clean between the teeth?

Periodontics

How can we help?

If you have swollen or bleeding gums, or a hard build-up you cannot brush away, our dentists and hygienists can examine you and explain your options. You can also explore our dental hygiene and dental check-up services. Call 13 13 16 or book online at any of our nine Core Dental practices.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What are the signs of needing a deep dental cleaning?

Signs include a hard white or yellowish build-up on the gum line, swollen or red gums, bleeding when brushing or flossing, and gum pockets. A Core Dental dentist or hygienist can examine your gums to confirm whether a deep clean is needed.

How does plaque become tartar?

Plaque that is not removed by brushing and flossing can harden into tartar, also called calculus, which cannot be removed at home. Core Dental hygienists remove tartar by scaling during a clean.

What are the two steps of deep dental cleaning at Core Dental?

Deep cleaning has two main steps: scaling, which removes tartar from the teeth, and root planing, which cleans the root surface within the gum pockets to remove bacteria. Our clinicians explain each step before starting.

How is comfort managed during a deep clean?

Your mouth is numbed with local anaesthetic first. Usually one quarter of the mouth, occasionally half, is treated per visit so you can still speak and eat afterwards. Core Dental clinicians will talk you through what to expect.

Why is gum disease treated early?

Untreated gum disease is associated with bone loss and tooth loss, and it is recognised as a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Core Dental dentists examine your gums early so treatment can begin promptly.

Who can assess whether I need a deep dental cleaning?

A dentist or hygienist can measure your gum pockets, check for tartar and recommend suitable treatment. At Core Dental our dentists, hygienists and registered specialists work together for gum care.

How do I book a gum check at Core Dental?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne and are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, with Sunday closed.