WHAT IS IT?
- Gingivitis is a form of periodontal disease.
- It occurs when plaque build-up leads to inflammation and infection, which attacks the gingiva (gums).
- Eventually gingivitis can attack the periodontal ligament and result in gum abscesses and teeth becoming loose.
- Gingivitis in varying degrees is very common and most people will experience it at some point. For example, it can occur during puberty due to hormonal changes and can recur later in life depending on oral hygiene.

SYMPTOMS
- Bleeding while brushing the teeth is the first sign of gingivitis. If action is not taken, other symptoms may develop including:
  - Oral sores;
  - Swelling of the gums;
  - Reddening of the gums;
  - The gums being painful to the touch.
- If gingivitis is untreated gum disease can develop. This involves the fibres of the periodontal ligament becoming weaker, resulting in gaps between teeth and gums.
- Eventually this can result in the loss of teeth and the formation of abscesses in the gums.

CAUSES
- Gingivitis mainly results from the long-term build-up of plaque, a mixture of mucus, bacteria and accumulated food debris.
- If plaque is not removed by regular brushing it can mineralise, turning into tartar, a deposit that solidifies at the base of the teeth. The build-up of plaque and tartar inflames the gingiva.
- The bacteria in tartar produce toxins resulting in infections.
- Injury to the gums can result in gingivitis. This can be caused by brushing the teeth too hard.
- Other causes include:
  - Some drugs, such as oral contraceptive pills;
  - Pregnancy and conditions such as diabetes and general ill health;
  - Uneven teeth or the sharp edges of fillings, as well as inadequately cleaned oral appliances such as dentures.

TREATMENT
- A dentist will first attempt to remove excess plaque from the teeth.
- After this initial cleaning it is vital that the teeth continue to be meticulously cleaned. This involves regular brushing (at least twice a day). The use of dental floss is recommended in order to remove food trapped between teeth.
- Antibacterial mouth rinses can be used.
- Any uneven teeth should be repaired and any faulty dental appliances replaced.

PREVENTION
- It is vital that patients are educated in oral hygiene to prevent recurrence.
- Nurses can also advise patients to reduce their intake of sugary and fast foods and to cut down on eating between meals as it gives plaque more time to form between brushing.
- Smoking can add to the risk of developing gingivitis as smokers produce more bacterial plaque and the reduced oxygen in a smoker’s bloodstream makes it harder for the gums to heal.
- Patients should visit their dentist regularly (at least once a year) to spot any recurrence or development of gingivitis and to remove plaque build-up.

REFERENCES