



# Gum abscess: Everything you need to know

Medically reviewed by [Christine Frank, DDS](#) — Written by [Jon Johnson](#) on January 27, 2020

[Overview](#) [Treatment](#) [Symptoms](#) [Causes](#)

[Gum abscess vs. dental abscess](#) [When to see a dentist](#) [Summary](#)

A gum abscess is a pocket of infection in the gums or the space between the teeth and the gums.

Bacteria may reach the area due to a dental abscess or another oral hygiene issue, such as periodontitis.

Gum abscesses are slightly different to dental abscesses, though they may share some of the same symptoms and treatments. Home remedies may help treat the symptoms, but the abscess will need treatment and drainage from a dentist.

In this article, learn more about gum abscesses and how to treat them.

ADVERTISEMENT

## What is a gum abscess?



ADVERTISEMENT





Gingival abscess. Image credit: DRosenbach, 2010.

A gum abscess is an infected pocket of tissue in the gums.

The mouth and gums are normally full of both good and bad bacteria. A buildup of bad bacteria contributes to plaque and tartar, which may lead to tooth decay and other dental issues.

If bad bacteria find their way into an area of open tissue, they may take over, multiplying and causing an infection.

The body responds by sending white blood cells to fight the infection. To do so, they will cause swelling to try to cut off and eliminate the bacteria. The result is a swollen, painful pocket of pus called an abscess.

There are two main types of gum abscess: gingival and periodontal.

Gingival abscesses only occur in the gum tissue. They do not involve the teeth at all. They may occur if a sharp piece of food gets lodged directly into the gums and causes an infection.

Periodontal abscesses occur in the space between the teeth and the gums. These are more common in people with periodontal disease, though they may also develop due to injury or food getting stuck between the teeth and the gums.

## Treatment

The treatment options for a gum abscess include:

### Dental procedures

In the dentist's office, treatment for a gum abscess includes draining the abscess, as well as removing any contaminants from the area between the gums and the teeth.

If a person has any signs of plaque buildup or periodontal disease, the

ADVERTISEMENT



The abscess will also need drainage. The dentist may make a small incision in the swollen area to drain it.

When the abscess is open and discharging pus, they may simply apply pressure to the area to allow the pus to drain completely.

Dentists will generally order an X-ray to see if the abscess has caused any breakdown of the bone. Bone loss may occur in a severe infection, or if the gum abscess goes without treatment for a long time.

If the bone loss is severe, the dentist may recommend procedures to help repair the bone and surrounding tissues.

If a gum abscess affects the inner pulp of the tooth, a person may need a root canal. In some cases, the dentist may also recommend extracting the tooth next to the abscess.

People with periapical abscesses — which occur when bacteria invade the dental pulp, due to widespread decay, trauma, or a cracked tooth, for example — may need a root canal or an extraction.

## Antibiotics

Antibiotic medications are another key part of the standard treatment process for a gum abscess.

Oral antibiotics can kill the bacteria causing the infection and keep the infection from spreading or reinfecting the area. This may also reduce swelling and pain in the area.

Antibiotics are not a replacement for dental work, however, and they will not cure the abscess.

## Home remedies

A dentist may also recommend some simple home remedies to help relieve the symptoms. For instance, taking over-the-counter pain medications such as ibuprofen (Advil) can reduce pain and swelling.

Additionally, rinsing the mouth with warm salt water may help reduce pain and sensitivity.

Home remedies might help manage the symptoms, but the pocket of

ADVERTISEMENT



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) note that **46%** of all adults over the age of 30 show signs of gum disease, while “severe gum disease affects about 9% of adults.”

Gum disease breaks down the gums and tissues in the mouth holding the teeth in place. This can create a space between the teeth and the gums where bacteria can live and multiply, potentially leading to abscesses.

Some other factors can increase the risk of periodontitis. For instance, the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research note that smoking is the **most significant risk factor** for periodontal gum disease.

Other risk factors for periodontal disease include:

- diabetes
- obesity
- arthritis
- heart disease
- hepatitis C
- hormonal changes (in females)
- some illnesses
- certain medications that disrupt the flow of saliva
- genetics

## Compromised immune system

A person with a weaker immune system may also be more likely to experience a gum abscess, as the body may have a harder time fighting off infections.

Conditions that affect the immune system, such as HIV, may make it more difficult for the body to fight off the bacteria that lead to gum disease and abscesses.

## Other infections

A gum abscess may occur due to another infection in the mouth, such as an abscessed tooth or an infection in a periodontal pocket.

ADVERTISEMENT



In these cases, the bacterial buildup may spread from the original infection site and infect the gum around it.

ADVERTISEMENT

MEDICAL NEWS TODAY NEWSLETTER

## Stay in the know. Get our free daily newsletter

Expect in-depth, science-backed topline of our best stories every day. Tap in and keep your curiosity satisfied.

SIGN UP NOW

Your [privacy](#) is important to us

## Gum abscess vs. dental abscess

Strictly speaking, a gum abscess occurs in the gums, while a tooth abscess occurs in the tooth itself. However, there is some overlap. For instance, a periodontal abscess often affects both the tooth and the gum.

Also, sometimes, an infection in the tooth and pulp may lead to an infection in the gums. This may be a tooth that has a large cavity or decay in the root, which creates space within the tooth and surrounding tissue for bacteria to multiply.

At other times, a deep gum abscess may get worse and begin to affect the tooth and pulp.

ADVERTISEMENT



A dentist may refer to several abscesses in the mouth as “oral abscesses.” They will identify and treat each type.

## When to see a dentist

Anyone experiencing symptoms of a gum abscess or a tooth abscess should see a dentist as soon as possible.

Home remedies may provide temporary relief from symptoms such as pain. However, a dentist will need to drain and treat the pocket of pus.

The affected tooth or section of gum will also need treatment to prevent further infections or control the symptoms of issues such as periodontal disease.

ADVERTISEMENT

## Summary

A gum abscess is a pocket of pus and bacteria from an infection in the gums. The abscess may develop due to poor oral hygiene or as a result of other infections or conditions.

Treatments and home remedies may help clear the infection. However, a dentist will need to drain the abscess to prevent further infections.

ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT

Last medically reviewed on January 27, 2020

Dentistry Infectious Diseases / Bacteria / Viruses

+ 3 sources



## RELATED COVERAGE

### What's to know about dental abscesses?

A dental or tooth abscess is a buildup of pus that forms inside the teeth or gums. An abscess is usually caused by a bacterial infection that is often...

[READ MORE](#)

### Swollen gum around one tooth: What to know

Medically reviewed by [Christine Frank, DDS](#)

Many different issues can cause a swollen gum around one tooth, including periodontal disease or a dental abscess. Learn more about the

ADVERTISEMENT



[READ MORE](#)

## What to know about antibiotics and tooth infections

Medically reviewed by [Dena Westphalen, Pharm.D.](#)

Antibiotics may be an effective treatment option for a tooth infection. There are many different types of antibiotic and many other potential remedies.

[READ MORE](#)

## Everything you need to know about a dead tooth

Medically reviewed by [Christine Frank, DDS](#)

A dead tooth is one that no longer receives any blood flow. It is caused by either decay or injury. Learn more about the symptoms and treatment.

[READ MORE](#)

## What to know about gum boils

Medically reviewed by [Christine Frank, DDS](#)

Gum boils are swollen, pus-filled bumps on the gums. Treatment involves medication and dental procedures, while home remedies may reduce discomfort...

ADVERTISEMENT





## Get our newsletter

Keep up with the ever-changing world of medical science with new and emerging developments in health.

 

Your [privacy](#) is important to us

[Editorial articles](#)

[All news topics](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Knowledge Center](#)

[Ad Policy](#)

[About us](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Do Not Sell My Info](#)

[Terms](#)

[Privacy Settings](#)

© 2004-2020 Healthline Media UK Ltd, Brighton, UK, a Red Ventures Company. All rights reserved. MNT is the registered trade mark of Healthline Media. Any medical information published on this website is not intended as a substitute for informed medical advice and you should not take any action before consulting with a healthcare professional.

[About](#) | [Careers](#) | [Advertise with us](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



## Symptoms

The main symptoms of a gum abscess are pain and swelling in the area. Depending on where the abscess is located along the gums, it may also cause pain when a person chews or bites down.

A person may notice a lump or bulge in the area of the abscess that causes pain and pressure.

The person may also experience:

- bad breath
- pus discharge in the mouth
- a bad taste in the mouth
- loose teeth
- bleeding gums
- sensitive teeth or gums
- a receding gumline
- a fever

## Causes

The cause of a gum abscess is a buildup of bacteria in the tissues between the teeth and the gums. However, there are a few possible reasons for this bacterial infection to occur, including:

### Poor oral hygiene and periodontitis

ADVERTISEMENT

