

Non-Surgical Periodontal Therapy – Scale and Root Planing

The initial stage of treating periodontal disease is usually a thorough cleaning that may include scaling to remove plaque and tartar deposits beneath the gum line.

Why do I need Non-surgical Periodontal Therapy?

You have been recommended non-surgical periodontal therapy as you have been diagnosed with **periodontal disease**, also known as gum disease.

Periodontal disease (gum disease) can break down the support (bone) structures of your teeth, so that eventually, they will become loose. The problem is that until it gets quite severe, the person often has no symptoms. Sadly, the damage to the support structures of the teeth is irreversible. The good news is that if gum disease is caught in time, its progression can be halted and improved upon, and that is the key.

If left untreated, gum disease can result in abscesses or the complete destruction of the tooth's supporting tissues and, ultimately, tooth loss.

Signs and symptoms

- Gums that bleed when brushing or flossing
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Receding gums
- Deep pockets (the space between the gums and the teeth)
- Metallic taste
- Tooth sensitivity for no apparent reason
- Loose or shifting teeth
- Abscesses
- Pus around gums and teeth
- Chronic bad breath

Scaling & Root Planing (Deep Cleaning) versus Regular Cleaning

Scaling and Root Planing, also known as a deep cleaning, is very different from a regular cleaning. A regular cleaning focuses on the surfaces of the teeth and between teeth above the gum line. During a regular cleaning, the teeth are also polished.

A deep cleaning, or scaling and root planing, is needed in order to remove bacteria, calculus (tartar), and debris that has collected under the gum line.

The presence of calculus under the gumline creates a safe haven for bacteria to collect, and cannot be removed by brushing, flossing or with a regular cleaning. The presence of this bacteria causes an immune response from the body. This immune response results in inflammation, to fight the bacterial infection. If left untreated, the infection and inflammation will continue and progress further under the gum line, resulting in loose teeth and bone loss, and ultimately, the loss of one or more teeth.

	Scaling & Root Planing (Deep Cleaning)	Regular Dental Cleaning
Local Anesthetic (numbing) Required	X	
Calculus, plaque, and debris removed at and above the gum line		X
Calculus, plaque, bacteria and debris removed below the gum line	X	
Antibiotics may be prescribed for healing	X	
Root of tooth smoothed and shaped to remove bacteria	X	



Scaling and Root Planing

What is Scale and Root Planing?

Scaling involves removal of plaque and calculus (hardened plaque) deposits that are visible above and just below the gums on the root of the tooth. An ultrasonic cleaning device or hand instruments is typically to do this. In most cases this should not be uncomfortable, but in severe cases of periodontal disease local anaesthetic may be required if the gums are sore.

Root Planing involves smoothing the root surfaces to prevent plaque and bacteria reattaching to the tooth



Regular removal of plaque and calculus (every 3, 6 or 12 months, depending on the situation) is vital to prevent the reoccurrence of periodontal disease.

In the most severe of cases, a referral to a Periodontist (Gum Specialist) may be required or even periodontal surgery.

How long does it take?

Initial scale and root planning may require **1-4 appointments**, depending on depth of gum pockets and the amount of scale, to completely remove all scale and ensure healing of your gums. In moderate and advance cases local anaesthetic is usually required at each appointment.

What can I expect afterwards?

- Discomfort can vary after root planing, but one can expect it to be sorer afterwards since it's usually in a deeper region under the gums.
- The teeth themselves can become a bit more sensitive to temperature, and bleeding might occur for a little while.
- Over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen work very well to alleviate discomfort, but stronger painkillers can be given should you need them.
- Brushing and flossing can be delayed or done more gently to avoid aggravating any bruised or tender gum areas.
- Your dentist or hygienist may recommend salt water or chlorhexidine rinses.

Remember:

- Teeth are meant to last a lifetime. Tooth loss due to gum disease is not an inevitable result of ageing.
- Effective daily plaque removal and professional tooth cleaning will prevent and/or control gum disease.
- Following initial treatment, regular maintenance through professional cleans is required to prevent its reoccurrence