

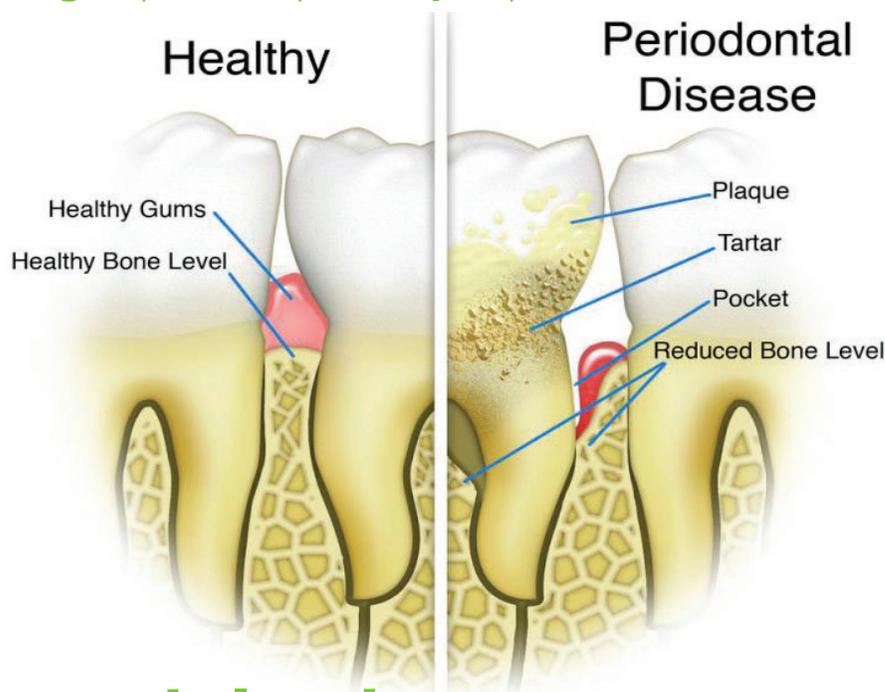
# If your **BONE** was **melting** away, would you want to know about it?

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**I used to get shy when it came to telling patients about the damage to their jaw bone. I didn't want to alarm them. That was until I found that my silence was not helping patients keep their teeth, because they failed to take care of gum disease or wear a night guard. Others were unable to place implants because they waited too long after the tooth was extracted. After it's already too late, patients invariably tell me that if they would have known how serious this was, they definitely would have taken care of their gums, their bite, their implant, etc.**

It may sound scary to predict hurricane-level damage in your mouth, but the damage of bone loss is real. Once you lose bone, it can be expensive and uncomfortable, and sometimes impossible to repair the damage. Prevention and early treatment will make it possible to chew and smile comfortably for a lifetime. You may enjoy a steaming bowl of oatmeal – but not when you're forced to because you have no place to chew. And it is embarrassing to see that you are covering your smile in all your family pictures.

The roots of teeth are about 20mm long. When the roots and the bone surrounding them are healthy, the bone covers and holds the roots firmly, allowing one to chew comfortably and smile with confidence. But when the bone starts decaying, chewing and smiling become more difficult.



## There are three main ways to lose bone:

- 1) Periodontal gum disease.** This is the most common and well-known cause of bone loss. Most people are aware that gum disease is an infection that destroys their bone. For every tooth lost due to tooth decay, we lose 15 teeth due to gum disease. And yet, as much as people believe gum disease is serious, they will all too often put off or refuse periodontal treatment until serious damage has already occurred.
- 2) Clenching and grinding teeth.** This is the most widely ignored cause, despite the fact that the effect of bite-related bone loss can often be more damaging. Besides losing supporting bone, the bite can cause tooth loss due to fractures and crack-lines. A night guard can protect the teeth and bone from the 900-pound forces that can pound away at your teeth and bone, causing teeth to crack and bone to melt away.
- 3) Extraction of a tooth without placing an implant or bone graft.** If a tooth needs to be removed, it is critical to immediately put a bone graft or get an implant. Otherwise, 25 percent of the bone in the area of the extraction will melt away during the first year. The long term results can be frustrating when an implant is no longer possible.

Conscientious dentists need to help their patients make the most informed decision. I will often ask my patients, "Do I have your permission to share with you everything that concerns me?" Many patients will tell me, wisely, "Be straight-up with me – I want to understand my situation so I can do the right thing."

Taking care of problems early can save time, money and aggravation. So don't be afraid to hear the whole truth. Invariably, you're much better off finding out about problems that affect your teeth earlier, rather than later.