

HEALTH

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TCM: Watch your mouth

Periodontal disease is the inflammation or degeneration of the gums. It usually begins as gingivitis (inflammation of the gums, characterised by redness and swelling) and progresses to periodontitis, an inflammation of the periodontium caused by bacteria that infects the roots of the teeth and surrounding gum crevices. This results in bleeding, pus, and the gradual loss of bone and tissue that support the teeth. Although the main cause of this condition is poor oral hygiene, endocrine factors may be involved because it commonly occurs at puberty and during pregnancy.

According to TCM, the teeth and bones share the same source - both are nourished by kidney essence. The stomach and large intestine meridians pass through the upper and lower tooth beds respectively and supply blood and *chi* to the regions. Periodontal disease in TCM is categorised as *ya xuan* (gaping gums), and is caused by factors such as improper diet, chronic disease and weakness due to ageing.

Instead of applying a local treatment for periodontal disease, TCM focuses on internal disharmonies that

mostly occur in the kidney and digestive system.

It's believed that kidney deficiencies lead to loose teeth and receding gums. Blood and *chi* deficiencies make the gums look pale. Bright-red and swollen gums are associated with stomach fire - when they produce bleeding and pus, the associated meridians are damaged.

If inflammation is obvious and there is bleeding and pus, treatment should be used to clear the stomach fire, relieving swelling and pain. A herbal preparation, *qing wei san* (stomach clearing powder) may be useful. Dandelion, great burdock and gardenia fruit also help relieve severe swollen gums. Snakegourd root and Chinese honeylocust spine help pus drainage and Indian madder root and couch grass rhizome can arrest bleeding.

In cases of loose teeth, chewing difficulties, frequent soreness, gingival recession and ulceration, a herbal preparation, Six Rehmannia Pills, may

be useful. Chinese wolfberry fruit and dodder seed replenish the kidney essence and help rebuild the tooth bed. Anemarrhena rhizome and cypress bark ease the recurrent inflammation.

You can also try an ancient practice to keep teeth and gums healthy. In the morning and night before brushing your teeth, use your brush or fingers to rub the gum for two to three minutes. Then knock against the upper and lower jaws 30-50 times. This will assist the blood circulation in the tooth bed and help to firm the teeth.

Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton