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Gingivitis

Overview
This is a mild form of gum disease. Without treatment, it can lead to serious dental problems.

Causes
Gingivitis is caused by poor dental hygiene. When you don't brush and floss properly, plaque builds up on your teeth. Plaque is a mix of bacteria, mucus and food debris. It builds up along your gum line. It hardens into a deposit we call "tartar." A buildup of plaque and tartar leads to tooth decay. The bacteria in these deposits release toxins. This irritates your gums. Your gums become infected, swollen and tender. This is gingivitis.

Risk Factors
Your risk is higher for gingivitis if you have diabetes that you don't control, or if you have certain other diseases or infections. The risk is higher for pregnant women. Certain medications raise your risk. And, your risk is higher if you have misaligned teeth, rough fillings, braces, implants or other dental hardware that isn't maintained properly.

Symptoms
With gingivitis, your gums may look bright red or purple. They may be shiny and swollen. Your gums may be tender when you touch them, and they may bleed when you brush or floss. You may have sores in your mouth.

Treatment
Gingivitis is treated with better oral hygiene. You may need to have a professional cleaning. Your dentist, dental hygienist or periodontist removes the buildup of plaque and tartar on your teeth. Then, you'll get tips for proper home care. If other issues are contributing to your gingivitis, you may need to correct those, too. Your dentist will create a care plan that's right for you.