

Readers get in touch

Dear Editor

I just wanted to say well done and thank you for this month's great issue. I really enjoyed the piece on Dr Paterson. I love reading about the history of the village and am proud to live here.

Thank again

David Inglis
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Dear Editor

I was really pleased to read in the recent issue of the magazine that I am not the only person to have encountered an otter in my

garden in October of this year. It would be most interesting to hear if there have been any more sightings, as I found it amazing that an otter would appear in such a built-up area and I would love to know where it might originally have come from. My only experience of seeing one of these fantastic creatures has been at our house near Oban. I look forward to hearing if he (or she) has been seen recently.

I would also mention how much I like and appreciate the *Times* - keep up the good work.

Mrs M. Cooper
"Highchesters"
Bridge of Allan



Bridge of Allan Dental Care is your local dental practice that works hard to deliver consistent, high quality dental care to the people of Bridge of Allan and the surrounding area. When our patients attend for their dental health exams the gum condition is always assessed. If the gums are not as healthy as they could be then appropriate treatment is provided by the dentist or the hygienists to bring their gums back to health.

Each Friday morning in March we are offering the readers of The Bridge of Allan Times a **FREE** gum assessment at our practice in Union Street. Measurements will be recorded and advice on treatment will be given. If you are interested then please call Julie, our practice manager, on 01786 832 331. Book soon as places are limited.

Watch Your Mouth!

BY DR JAMES ARNOT BDS

Bad breath, bleeding gums, loose teeth? If you recognise any of these symptoms it's likely you are suffering from gum disease. Periodontal disease (as it should be called) is inflammation or infection of the tissues supporting the teeth. There are two main types of the disease: gingivitis and periodontitis.

Gingivitis is where there is inflammation of the soft gum tissue only and the gums around the teeth appear red and swollen. They often bleed when brushing. Children and teenagers who are poor at brushing their teeth often present with this. If gingivitis is left untreated it will progress to periodontitis.

In periodontitis, the inflammation not only affects the gum but spreads to the bone holding the teeth in place. As a result the teeth lose their support and become mobile. In time they will fall out. Surprisingly, more adults lose teeth through periodontal disease than from tooth decay.

Periodontal disease progresses slowly and is usually painless. As a result it can sometimes be quite advanced before you realise something is wrong. The most common symptoms are: red, swollen gums; bleeding gums; bad taste in the mouth; bad breath; gum shrinkage; loose teeth or teeth drifting apart.

With gum shrinkage the teeth appear longer than they have done in the past. This is where the expression "long in the tooth" derives from.

The main cause of periodontal disease is plaque, which is a film of bacteria that forms on the surface of the teeth and gums every day. It is soft and easily removed by tooth brushing or by using a cleaning aid between the teeth such as floss or interdental brushes. If the plaque is not removed, the bacteria it contains are free to cause their damage.

Sometimes the plaque mineralises and becomes a hard deposit called calculus (or tartar). Most adults at some point will find a small amount of this chalky substance behind their lower front teeth. Once it is in this form it can only be removed by a dentist or a hygienist. Other factors that can alter your susceptibility to periodontal disease include genetics, smoking, diabetes and pregnancy.

Usually your dentist is the first person to pick up the signs of periodontal disease, in which case you will likely be given an appointment with the hygienist at the practice. Hygienists concentrate on the treatment of gum disease by thorough cleaning to remove all the plaque and calculus that has formed. This is done with a specialist ultrasonic scaler and hand instruments. As this procedure can be quite sensitive, a small amount of local anaesthetic can be used to numb the area. The hygienist will also show you how to remove the plaque effectively from your



teeth using toothbrushes, floss and special interdental brushes.

Your susceptibility to periodontal disease never disappears but its progress can be halted. This is achieved by meticulous home cleaning and regular visits to your dentist and hygienist.

There has been a lot in the press recently linking periodontal disease to a number of conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes and low birth weight babies. Researchers have found that people with periodontal disease are twice as likely to suffer from coronary heart disease than those without it. One explanation of the link between the two is that oral bacteria enter the blood stream and attach to fatty plaques in the coronary arteries, thereby contributing to clot formation. Blood clots in the coronary arteries restrict the amount of blood and therefore oxygen getting to the heart, which can lead to heart attacks. Additional studies have pointed to a relationship with periodontal disease and stroke.

So, next time you are at your dentist be sure to ask about the health of your gums, not just your teeth.