

**Dept. of  
Dental Surgery**

**Editor's  
Pick**

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**I am 49 years old. In the past ten days, I have seen pieces of hard, irregular chips coming off from my teeth, but I am not sure if those are pieces of tooth. The fallen chips were yellow on one side, and black on the other. When the pieces chipped off, some blood oozed out from the gum, but my teeth are still quite sturdy so I did not consult any dentist. What exactly is happening to me? Is there anything that I could do at home to curb this problem? Do I need to see a dentist?**

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**A** Those are calculus or tartar falling out from your mouth, and not tooth chipping. People might mistakenly think it is tooth chip due to its hardness and its tooth-like colour. Most chipped calculus is triangular, with hard and sharp edges and a rough surface. It can be white, yellow or dark-coloured.

Calculus chips off from time to time, but not often. You will find a triangular hole between the back of your teeth, which is the normal space that is supposed to be there but had been clogged up by tartar for so many years.

Bleeding on your gum is caused by gum inflammation, or periodontal disease. What we commonly known as gum disease is in fact bacterial infection.

The mildest form of gum disease is called gingivitis. This is the initial stage of gum inflammation caused by plaque and tartar on the teeth. Gingivitis can usually be stopped and reversed with careful brushing, flossing, and regular cleanings by dental professionals.

If tartar is not removed and gingivitis is left untreated, the condition can worsen and lead to periodontitis. With this gum disease, pockets form between the gums and teeth. Those pockets become infected by bacteria beneath the gums. The body's immune system releases chemicals to fight the bacteria. These chemicals, along with the substances the bacteria release, can damage the bone and other tissues that hold the teeth in place. This can lead ultimately to tooth loss and bone degradation. Gum disease is actually the number one reason why teeth fall out.

Please do the following to prevent tartar from forming:

- 1.** Brush your teeth regularly using the proper technique. Use a brush with soft bristles that is small enough to reach all the areas in your mouth. Make sure the hard-to-reach surfaces behind your teeth and on your rear molars are cleaned.
- 2.** Opt for tartar-control toothpaste with fluoride. It can help prevent plaque from hardening into tartar. Additionally, the fluoride in the formula will help repair any damage to your enamel that may have already happened. Some formulas also contain triclosan, an antibiotic that fights the bacteria in plaque.
- 3.** Floss! No matter how diligently you are about brushing your teeth, only flossing daily can remove the plaque between your teeth and prevent tartar formation in these difficult-to-reach areas.
- 4.** Watch your diet. The bacteria in your mouth thrive on sugary and starchy foods. When they are exposed to those foods, they release damaging acids. Try to eat a healthy diet and limit your sugar intake. Drinking plenty of water during and after meals may also help minimize plaque build-up.
- 5.** Don't smoke. Studies have shown that people who smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products are more likely to have tartar on their teeth and under their gums.
- 6.** Having chunks of calculus falling out shows that you need to have the rest of the calculus on your teeth cleaned off, so that your gum disease does not progress further. Once calculus is formed, it could only be removed by a dentist, by scaling and polishing. Make sure to visit your dentist every 6 months to remove any plaque and tartar that might have formed and prevent further complications.

**Dr Raymond Lim has been at the forefront of patient-centric dental care services and professional expertise since 2005. The National University of Singapore (NUS) alumnus who received a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (B.D.S) has advanced his professional career with three years at National Dental Centre treating trauma and emergency patients and a two-year post at polyclinics as the overall in charge. His subsequent years in private practice have further spurred his passion in implantology; he was awarded Aesthetic Implant Dentistry from the University of Uclan (UK) in 2011.**



**Founding B9 Dental Centre in 2013, Dr Raymond has seen early success with its current group of three dental centres within the first year. Lauded for their comprehensive expertise and trusted service, B9 Dental Centre was awarded with Top 10 Special Achievement in Dental Care Awards by Promising SME 500 2014.**



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