

Oral Health Tips

Diabetes and Oral Health

Tooth and gum problems can happen to anyone. A sticky film (plaque) containing germs (bacteria) builds up on your teeth. High blood glucose (blood sugar) helps germs grow. The result can be red, sore and swollen gums that bleed when you brush your teeth. Diabetics experience tooth and gum problems at a higher rate than non-diabetics and can even lose their teeth if their blood glucose stays high.

Diabetics are at increased risk for oral infections and gum disease. However, many people who have diabetes are unaware they have gum disease. Sometimes a routine dental exam might reveal that you could be diabetic because many times, the mouth is a mirror for what might be happening with the rest of the body. The mouth may offer some clear-cut signals that diabetes is present. Early detection is important. If left untreated, diabetes can also make you prone to other mouth problems, such as fungal infections, poor healing and dry mouth.

Good oral hygiene at home and regular professional dental cleanings/checkups are a must. And let your dentist know if you have been diagnosed with diabetes.

Common Problems Associated with Diabetes

- Periodontal (gum) disease
- Tooth decay
- Delayed healing of tissue
- Diminished salivary flow and sensation of burning mouth or tongue
- Dry mouth, caused by diminished salivary flow, may also increase tooth decay

- Fungal infections such as thrush produce painful white (or sometimes red) patches in the mouth or on the tongue that may become sore or ulcerated
- Impaired taste
- Those with poorly controlled blood glucose may lose more teeth due to periodontal disease than those who have good control of their diabetes
- Periodontal disease may make it harder to control your blood sugar levels
- Poorly controlled diabetes may make it more difficult to treat periodontal disease

Common Signs

See your dentist immediately if you notice:

- Gums that bleed easily
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Pus between the teeth and gums when gums are pressed
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste in mouth

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- Permanent teeth that are loose Oral
- Any change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Any change in the fit of partial dentures

What to Expect at the Dental Office

- To prevent problems with bacterial infections in the mouth, your dentist may prescribe antibiotics, medicated mouth rinses and more frequent cleanings.
- It is recommended that you make morning appointments with your dentist because blood glucose levels tend to be under better control at these times.

Take Extra Care at Home

- Start by controlling your blood sugar levels to help keep teeth and gums strong
- Brush at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- Floss every day
- Look for early signs and symptoms of oral disease
- Get regular checkups and professional cleanings

Sources: American Dental Association: www.ada.org;
American Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.org;
Academy of General Dentistry: www.agd.org;
National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse:
www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov