

Oral Health Tips

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Diabetes and Oral Health— Take Extra Care of Your Mouth

Tooth and gum problems can happen to anyone. A sticky film full of germs (called plaque) builds up on your teeth. High blood glucose (also called blood sugar) helps germs (bacteria) grow. Then you can get red, sore, and swollen gums that bleed when you brush your teeth. People with diabetes can have tooth and gum problems more often if their blood glucose stays high. You can even lose your teeth. High blood glucose can also damage other parts of the body, such as the heart, blood vessels, eyes, and kidneys. Heart and blood vessel disease can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

If you have diabetes you should know that you are at increased risk for oral infections and gum disease. However, many people who have diabetes are unaware they have the disease. A routine dental exam might uncover the presence of diabetes because the mouth can offer clear-cut signals that the disease is present. Early detection is important because, when left untreated, diabetes can also make you prone to other mouth problems, including fungal infections, poor healing and dry mouth.

You can do a lot to prevent or slow down diabetes problems. Good oral hygiene at home and preventive oral health care is important to slow the progression of periodontal disease and other oral health problems. Regular professional cleanings and dental checkups are a must. And let your dentist know if you have been diagnosed with diabetes.

Common Problems

- Periodontal (gum) disease and delayed healing
- Tooth decay
- Diminished salivary flow and sensation of burning mouth or tongue
- Dry mouth 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 sugar (glucose) may lose more teeth due to periodontal disease than those who have good control of their diabetes, and
- Periodontal disease may make it harder to control your blood sugar levels.

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
- 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, and
- 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