

Patient's Page

DIABETES

& YOUR ORAL HEALTH

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Overview

Diabetes affects about 23.6 million Americans. This is 7.8% of the population with 1.6 million new cases diagnosed each year for people over age 20. If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, you may know that the disease can cause problems with your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart and other parts of your body. Diabetes can lower your resistance to infection and can slow the healing process.

What information do I need to give my dentist about my diabetes?

It's important to keep your medical records up-to-date. Let your dentist know:

- if you have been diagnosed with diabetes;
- if the disease is under control;
- if there has been any other change in your medical history, and;
- the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

What oral health problems can be associated with diabetes?

The most common oral health problems associated with diabetes are:

- tooth decay;
- periodontal (gum) disease;
- salivary gland dysfunction;
- fungal infections;
- lichen planus and lichenoid reactions (inflammatory skin disease);
- infection and delayed healing; and
- taste impairment.

What should I know about diet and tooth decay?

Your teeth are covered with plaque, a sticky film of bacteria. After you have a meal, snack or beverage that contains sugars or starches, the bacteria release acids derived from dietary sugars that attack tooth enamel. Repeated attacks can cause the enamel to break down and may eventually result in cavities.

When diabetes is not controlled properly, high glucose levels in saliva may help bacteria thrive. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and cleaning once a day between your teeth with floss or an interdental cleaner helps remove decay-causing plaque.

Plaque that is not removed can eventually harden (calcify) into calculus, also called tartar. When tartar collects above the gumline, it becomes more difficult to thoroughly brush and clean between teeth. This can create conditions that lead to chronic inflammation and infection in the mouth.

Is there a connection between diabetes and periodontal (gum) disease?

Because diabetes reduces the body's resistance to infection, the gums are among the tissues likely to be affected. Periodontal diseases are infections of the gum and bone that hold your teeth in place. Periodontal disease is often linked to the degree of control of diabetes. For example, patients with inadequate blood sugar control appear to develop periodontal disease more often and more severely, and they lose more teeth than persons who have good control of their diabetes. That's why good maintenance of blood sugar levels, a well-balanced diet that meets your needs, good oral care at home, regular dental checkups and periodontal examinations are important.



Because of lowered resistance and a longer healing process, periodontal diseases often appear to be more frequent and more severe among persons with diabetes.