

PATIENT'S PAGE



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DIABETES AND ORAL HEALTH – what you should know...

Diabetes is a disease that can affect the whole body — your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart, and other important systems in the body. It can also affect your mouth. People with diabetes face a higher than normal risk of oral health problems. The link between diabetes and the development of oral health problems is high blood sugar. If the blood sugar is poorly controlled, it is more likely that oral health problems will arise.

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.

Diabetes and periodontal disease

Diabetes that is not properly controlled can lead to periodontal (gum) diseases in both young and old people. Periodontal diseases are infections of the gums and bone that hold the teeth in place. Because diabetes reduces the body's resistance to infection, the gums are among the tissues most likely to be affected. 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. Because of blood vessel changes that occur with diabetes, the thickened blood vessels can impair the efficiency of the flow of nutrients and removal of wastes from body tissues. This impaired blood flow can weaken the gums and bone, also making them more susceptible to infection.

Diabetes and dry mouth

Often a symptom of undetected diabetes, dry mouth means the mouth does not have enough saliva to keep itself moist. Saliva is necessary to help digest food, and prevent infection and tooth decay by controlling bacteria and fungi. Dry mouth can make tasting, chewing, and swallowing food difficult, and can impede speech. In addition, dry mouth can cause mouth infections and tooth decay. Your dentist may recommend a saliva substitute that can be used for relief from dry mouth discomfort. Your dentist may also recommend rinsing with a fluoride mouth rinse or an at-home topical application of fluoride. Using sugarless gum or sugarless mints, taking frequent sips of water, or using melting ice chips may help alleviate a dry mouth. Restricting intake of caffeine and alcohol also can help.

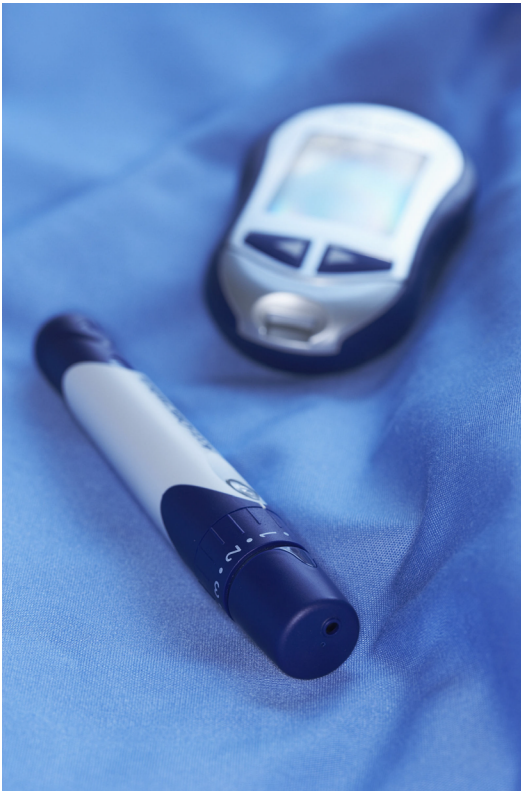
Diabetes and other oral health conditions

Thrush — People with diabetes who frequently take antibiotics to fight various infections are especially prone to developing a fungal infection of the mouth and tongue. The fungus thrives on the high glucose levels in the saliva of people with uncontrolled diabetes. Wearing dentures can also lead to fungal infections. Your dentist may prescribe antifungal medications to treat this condition. Good oral hygiene is critical.

Lichen planus — a skin disorder that produces lesions in the mouth. A more severe type of Lichen planus involves painful ulcers that erode surface tissue. Although there is no permanent cure, your dentist may prescribe a topical anesthetic or other medication to reduce and relieve the condition.

Taste impairment — some diabetics have reported that their sense of taste is diminished and altered taste sensations may influence their food choices in favor of sweet-tasting foods with highly refined carbohydrate content. This may worsen the diabetic patient's dental health and overall health.

Poor healing of oral tissues — People with uncontrolled diabetes do not heal quickly after oral surgery or other dental procedures because blood flow to the treatment site can be impaired. Follow your dentist's post-treatment instructions closely.



THE GOOD NEWS

The good news for people with diabetes is that by practicing good oral hygiene habits — brushing at least twice daily (or preferably after every meal) with a toothpaste that contains fluoride, flossing daily, making regular visits to your dentist, and keeping blood sugar levels under control — the potential for infection from periodontal disease will be greatly reduced or eliminated, as will the risk of tooth loss.

LET YOUR DENTIST KNOW:

- if you have been diagnosed with diabetes;
- your current glycosylated hemoglobin level;
- when you took your last dose of insulin;
- if there has been any other change in your medical history;
- the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking; and
- your primary physician's name and phone number to include in your personal file.