

PERIODONTAL DISEASE SERIES

Periodontal Disease and Diabetes

If you are diabetic, you're at a greater risk of suffering from oral infections and diseases, including periodontal disease.

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection of the teeth, gums, and bone that surrounds your teeth. It's caused by the bacteria that live in plaque, the sticky film of food and bacteria that forms constantly on your teeth. The bacteria infect the tooth roots and cause pockets of infection to form in the gums.

The bacteria also produce toxins, and these toxins, combined with your body's reaction to them, destroy the bone around your teeth.



Microscopic view of plaque



Plaque causes periodontal disease



More frequent dental exams

The connection to diabetes

Diabetes contributes to periodontal disease in three ways: it lowers your body's ability of fight off infection, results in high blood sugar levels, and causes dry mouth.

Diabetes lowers the body's resistance to infection by causing blood vessels to thicken and become less elastic. This decreases the flow of white blood cells, oxygen, and nutrients to the body's tissues, and slows the removal of harmful wastes. This can weaken your mouth's resistance to infections like periodontal disease.

Having poorly controlled diabetes means that there are often excess levels of glucose in the blood and saliva. The harmful bacteria in your mouth that are responsible for periodontal disease thrive on this sugar.

Diabetics who don't successfully control their blood sugar levels also frequently experience a decrease in the flow of saliva, which can lead to a condition called dry mouth, or xerostomia. Saliva is vital for helping wash away the bacteria that cause periodontal disease. A lack of saliva allows plaque to build up easily on teeth.

Preventing periodontal disease

If you're a diabetic, it's important for you to prevent or control periodontal disease. Infections, such as periodontal disease, can cause blood sugar levels to rise, making it much harder for you to control your diabetes.

To help prevent bacterial infections in your mouth, you should brush and floss every day to remove the plaque and visit us regularly for dental cleanings. We may prescribe antibiotics, medicated mouth rinses, and more frequent dental exams.

With good dental and medical care, your gums and teeth can remain healthy and free of periodontal disease.