

Diabetes and Oral Health

Research suggests that people with diabetes are at higher risk for oral health problems.

Steps You Can Take to Avoid Oral Health Problems Include:

- Controlling your blood glucose
- Brushing and flossing properly to control plaque
- Seeing your dentist for regular checkups every six months

What Problems Am I at Higher Risk For?

Problems you may experience include:

- Gingivitis (an early stage of gum disease)
- Periodontitis (serious gum disease)
- Thrush (an infection caused by fungus that grows in the mouth)
- Dry mouth (causes soreness, ulcers, infections and cavities)

Gingivitis

Gingivitis is an early stage of gum disease that causes irritation, swelling, and bleeding in your gums. This can lead to a more serious form of gum disease called periodontitis. When you have gum disease, germs work to destroy your gums (gingiva) and the bone around your teeth. It starts with plaque - a sticky film of food, saliva, and germs. If you don't clean plaque and tartar away, even gentle brushing can cause your gums to bleed. This is called gingivitis.

Periodontitis

If your blood glucose levels are too high, you are more likely to develop serious gum disease. This is because you are more likely to get a bacterial infection and have a harder time fighting the bacteria that in your gums.

If nothing is done, the infection goes on to destroy the bone around your teeth and your teeth may start to move or get loose. When this happens, you may need surgery to save your teeth. They may fall out or need to be pulled.

Like all infections, gum disease may be a factor in causing blood glucose to rise and may make diabetes harder to control.

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“While your mouth may not hurt, there are warning signs to watch for.”

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Dry Mouth

You may notice that you have a dry mouth at times. This may be caused by medicines you take or if your blood glucose levels are high. A dry mouth can increase your risk of cavities, because there is less saliva to wash away germs and take care of the acids they create. Dry mouth can also lead to other problems, such as salivary gland infections.

If you have dry mouth, try drinking more sugar-free fluids, chewing sugar-free gum, or eating sugar-free candy to help keep the saliva flowing. Some people use saliva substitutes, available at drug stores. Good blood glucose control can also help you prevent or relieve dry mouth caused by diabetes.

Thrush

Another oral problem associated to diabetes include is thrush. Thrush is an infection caused by fungus that grows in your mouth. Maintain good blood glucose control and avoid smoking to control thrush. If you wear them, remove and clean dentures daily.

What Are the Warning Signs of a Problem?

While your mouth may not hurt, there are warning signs to watch for.

- Bleeding gums when you brush or floss. This bleeding is not normal. Even if your gums don't hurt, get them checked.
- Red, swollen, or tender gums.
- Gums that have pulled away from teeth. Part of the tooth's root may show, or your teeth may look longer.
- Pus between the teeth and gums (when you press on the gums).
- Bad breath.
- Teeth that are loose or moving away from each other.
- Changes in the way your teeth fit when you bite.
- Changes in the fit of partial dentures or bridges.

Should I Tell My Dentist About My Diabetes?

You have special needs and your dentist and hygienist are equipped to meet them—with your help. Keep your dentist and hygienist informed of any changes in your condition and any medication you might be taking. Postpone any non-emergency dental procedures if your blood glucose is not in good control.

For more information about the American Diabetes Association, visit professional.diabetes.org/PatientEd or call 1-800-DIABETES (342-2383).