

Oral Health and Diabetes

How Are Diabetes and Oral Health Linked?

People with diabetes are at greater risk for oral health problems, like gum disease and tooth decay. Gum disease can also be a warning sign for diabetes. To lower risk for oral health problems, it is important to control blood sugar and practice good oral health habits. If you have diabetes, discuss any special care you may need with both your dentist and primary health care professional (physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant).

What Are Common Oral Health Problems Related to Diabetes?

Diabetes can make it hard for your body to fight off infection. This means you may be at higher risk for some of these problems:

- **Gum Disease (Periodontitis)** occurs when tartar builds up and contributes to infections deep in your gums. It can lead to loss of tissue, bone, and teeth and increases your risk for other serious health problems, like heart attack or stroke.
- **Oral Thrush** can cause uncomfortable creamy white patches in your mouth or small white cracks at the corners of your mouth.
- **Dry Mouth** can cause soreness, ulcers, infections, and cavities. Dry mouth may be caused by medicines for high blood pressure, depression, or other health problems.



What Are Warning Signs of Oral Health Problems Related to Diabetes?

- Red, swollen, or tender gums or other pain in your mouth
- Bleeding while brushing, flossing, or eating
- Loose or separating teeth
- Sores in your mouth
- Bad breath, bad taste in mouth, or loss of taste
- White patches in the mouth
- A sticky, dry feeling in the mouth

How Are Oral Health Problems Diagnosed?

Oral health problems may be diagnosed after your mouth, teeth, gums, and tongue are examined. X-rays of your mouth may also help diagnose problems. If you are having any other problems related to your diabetes, talk with your primary health care professional.



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How Are These Problems Treated?

- Gum disease is treated by removing tartar and bacteria from your teeth and gums during a deep cleaning.
- You may be prescribed special medicines such as prescription mouthwash, gel, or oral antibiotics.
- If gum disease is more serious, dental surgery may be needed.
- Your medicines may be changed if they cause dry mouth.
- Your primary health care professional may work with you to develop diet and exercise habits that help you improve your diabetes and blood sugar levels.

How Can I Prevent These Complications if I Have Diabetes?

- Partner with your primary health care professional to keep your blood sugar under control.
- Take care of your mouth by brushing twice a day, flossing once a day, and getting dental check-ups twice a year.

- Quit smoking and tobacco use.
- Remove and clean dentures daily if you wear them.
- Discuss any oral health concerns with your dentist or primary health care professional.
- Discuss any medicines you are taking with both your dentist and primary health care professional.

Questions for My Primary Health Care Professional

- Will you examine my mouth at my primary health visits?
- You're not a dentist—why is it important for you to examine my mouth?
- What is my risk for gum disease?
- Should I tell my dentist that I have diabetes?
- Will the medicines I take give me dry mouth?
- How can I better control my diabetes?

For More Information

- **American Diabetes Association:** www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/oral-health-and-hygiene/diabetes-and-oral-health.html
- **American College of Physicians:** www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3003_Living_With_Diabetes_2014.pdf
- **American Dental Association:** www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes

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