



Take care

Diabetes oral health tips

Did you know that gum disease and tooth loss are linked to many long-term conditions — including diabetes?¹ Managing diabetes is essential to preventing gum disease — and is a win-win situation for your mouth, and your body.

Gum disease warning signs

Gum disease is an infection of the tissues that hold the teeth in place. Plaque builds and hardens under the gums, causing the gums to become inflamed. The infection could lead to bone loss around the teeth and even tooth loss.

Because gum disease is often painless, you may not even know you have it until you already have some serious damage. But there are warning signs — see your dentist right away if you have any of the following:

- Bleeding gums when you brush or floss — even if your gums don't hurt
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from teeth
- Pus between the teeth and gums (when you press on the gums)
- Bad breath
- Permanent teeth that are loose or moving away from each other
- Changes in the way your teeth feel when you bite
- Changes in the fit of partial dentures

1 Oral health: World Health Organization Fact Sheets.
www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs318/en/index.html.
Accessed 25 January 2017.

Symptoms such as pain, abscesses and loosening of teeth don't generally happen until the disease is in advanced stages. If you have any of these symptoms, be sure to visit your dentist early and regularly, before gum disease has a chance to progress any further.

Attacking gum disease

Treatment can help — even after gum disease has progressed. If it's in the beginning stages, dentists can use techniques like scaling and root planing to deep clean and remove the hardened plaque below the gum line.

For more advanced gum disease, the dentist may perform surgery to clean out the infected area under the gum, and then reshape the bone around the teeth. To ensure success, you must regularly floss and brush to keep plaque from building up again.

Gum disease is certainly something to watch out for when you have diabetes, but your chronic condition can also put you at risk for a number of other infections.

Oral infections

Some warning signs include:

- Swelling or pus around your teeth or gums, or any place in your mouth
- Pain in the mouth or sinus area that doesn't go away
- White or red patches on your gums, tongue, cheeks or the roof of your mouth
- Pain when chewing
- Teeth that hurt when you eat something hot or cold, or when you chew
- Dark spots or holes on your teeth

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Fungal infections

When you have diabetes, you are more likely to get fungal infections because fungus thrives on high glucose levels in saliva. And infections can make your blood glucose even harder to control. Smoking and wearing dentures can also contribute to these infections.

Medication is available to treat fungal infections; however, controlling your diabetes, not smoking, and removing and cleaning dentures daily can also prevent these infections.

Poor healing

If your diabetes is poorly controlled, you may heal more slowly after a dental procedure and increase your chance of infection. By keeping your blood glucose under control before, during and after any dental procedure, you'll boost your chances for a better recovery.

Dry mouth

Some diabetics complain of dry mouth, which may be caused by some of the medicines they take. Dry mouth can increase the risk of cavities because there is less saliva to wash away germs and take care of the acids they create.

If you're taking medications and your mouth feels dry, let your doctor or dentist know right away. You may be able to try a different drug or use "artificial saliva" to keep your mouth moist. Also, try drinking more fluids or chewing sugar-free gum or sugar-free candy to help keep saliva flowing.

Take time to care for your teeth

Here are a few recommendations:

- Brush at least twice a day with a soft toothbrush
- Spend at least three minutes brushing to clean all your teeth
- Floss once a day to remove plaque and bits of food from between your teeth and below the gum line
- Ask your dentist if a fluoride rinse would help to prevent tooth decay
- If you wear full or partial dentures, clean them daily and remove them when you sleep to keep your gum tissue healthy

Source: World Health Organization. Available at www.who.int. Accessed 25 January 2017

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Make a date with your dentist

Your dentist is your best partner in helping you control your diabetes. Visit your dentist regularly, and let him or her know if you're having problems with infection or trouble keeping your blood glucose under control. Here are some tips to plan ahead when visiting your dentist:

- Eat before you visit your dentist. The best time for dental work is when your blood glucose level is on the high side and insulin action is low.
- Take your normal medications before your dentist visit, unless your dentist or doctor tells you differently.
- Follow your normal meal plan after dental work. If you can't chew well, plan ahead to make sure you meet your nutritional needs.
- If your blood glucose is poorly controlled and you're scheduled to have dental surgery, talk with your dentist to see if postponing the surgery may be appropriate.

The higher your blood sugar, the harder it is to manage your diabetes. But taking the steps to treat gum disease, or keep it away in the first place, can lower your sugar and help you take control of your condition.

Take control of your oral health — get on the path to a healthier you.

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