



Diabetes and Your Mouth



Member Resources – Oral Health

More than 29 million Americans have diabetes. More than a quarter of these cases are undiagnosed.¹

How your diet can cause tooth decay

Plaque is a sticky film of bacteria. When you eat or drink anything with sugar or starch (milk, juice, candy, raisins), the plaque creates acid. The acid attacks your tooth enamel, causing it to wear down. The result? Cavities.

Diabetes and other diseases

Diabetes can make your body more prone to infection. This can take its toll on your gums and bones that hold your teeth in place. Gum disease is often linked to how well you control your blood sugar. People who aren't able to control it well tend to develop gum disease more often and more severely. They also lose more teeth. Pay special attention to the warning signs of gum disease, and see your dentist immediately if you have any of the following:²

- Tender, swollen, or red gums; mouth pain
- Bleeding while brushing, flossing, or eating hard foods like pretzels
- Gums that pull away from the teeth, causing teeth to look longer
- Loose or separating teeth
- Pus between teeth and gums
- Mouth sores
- Persistent bad breath
- Change in bite; change in fit of partial dentures

Oral health and diabetes

If you have diabetes, let your dentist know. To keep your medical records up to date, tell them:

- Which medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines and vitamins
- Whether the disease is under control
- Whether your medical history has changed

Diabetes contributes to the following oral health problems:

- Which medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines and vitamins
- Fungal infections; inflammatory skin diseases
- Tooth decay
- Gum disease
- Salivary gland problems
- Taste changes

Preventive dental care

If you have diabetes, it is even more important to get regular dental checkups and cleanings. Before having oral surgery, you may need antibiotics to reduce your risk of infection. Keeping your blood sugar under control before, during, and after surgery aids with healing.

The following conditions are also common:

1. Dry mouth

Dry mouth and diabetes go together. Saliva helps wash away food particles; without it, bacteria can increase. Dryness inflames the mouth's soft tissue, causing pain. If you have dry mouth, you are at increased risk for tooth decay. Your dentist may recommend something like a mouth rinse with fluoride. Sugarless gum and mints, frequent sips of water, and ice chips can help. Avoid foods and beverages that cause dehydration, like caffeine and alcohol.

2. Oral yeast infection/thrush

Dry mouth and high blood sugar can cause oral yeast infections. Denture wearers are even more at risk. Symptoms are sore areas in the mouth that look like cottage cheese. Treatments include antifungal medications.

3. Lichen planus

This skin disorder produces painful sores in the mouth called ulcers. It can also cause more severe ulcers that erode surface tissue. There is no permanent cure, but medications can help you feel better.

4. Altered taste

You may find sweet flavors less intense. This may lead you to choose even sweeter foods. But refined carbohydrates could worsen dental and overall health. Steer clear of sugars and starches.

1 <http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/statistics/>, March 2018.

2 <https://www.perio.org/consumer/gum-disease-symptoms.htm>, accessed April 2018.

Material discussed is meant for general informational purposes only and is not to be construed as medical advice. Although the information has been gathered from sources believed to be reliable, please note that individual situations can vary. You should always consult a licensed professional when making decisions concerning oral health care.

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