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In this issue of our newsletter:

From the American Dental Association
America's Leading Advocate for oral health

Diabetes and your Health

Oral Health Problems Associated With Diabetes

Oral health problems associated with diabetes are:

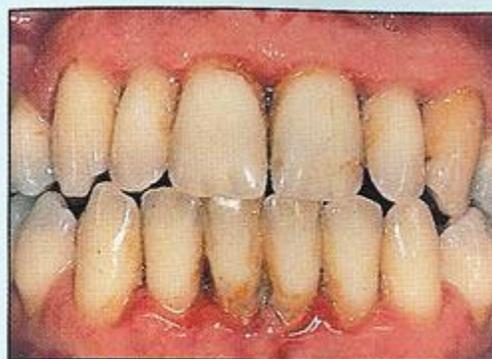
- periodontal (gum) disease
- thrush (oral candidiasis)

Gum Disease

Your teeth are covered with plaque. Plaque is a sticky film of bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. You can remove plaque by brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and cleaning one a day between your teeth with floss or another interdental cleaner. Plaque that is not removed can harden into calculus (tarter). When tarter forms above and below the gumline, it becomes harder to brush and clean well between teeth. The buildup of plaque and tarter can lead to gum disease.



Healthy Gingiva (Gums)



Periodontitis

Gum disease is an inflammation of the tissues that hold your teeth in place. If it is severe, it can destroy the tissue and bone. This can lead to tooth loss. Gum diseases are often more frequent and more severe in people with diabetes, especially if they smoke.

Diabetics with poor blood sugar control are more likely to lose teeth than diabetics who

have good control. There are also data suggesting that treating gum disease might help improve blood sugar control. That's why it is important to have healthy blood sugar levels, have a well-balanced diet, practice good oral care at home and see your dentist regularly for checkups.

People with gum disease may not see any symptoms. However, if you notice any of the following, see your dentist immediately:

- gums that bleed easily
- gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- pus between the teeth and gums when the gums are pressed
- constant bad breath or bad taste
- permanent teeth that are loose or separating
- a change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- a change in the fit of partial dentures

Thrush (Oral Candidiasis)

If you have dry mouth, high blood sugar levels, or if you smoke or take antibiotics, you are more likely to have fungal infections in your mouth. Thrush is such a fungal infection, It appears to occur more frequently among people with diabetes.

Thrush causes white or red patches in the mouth that may be sore or may become ulcers. It may attack the tongue and cause a painful, burning sensation. This can make it difficult to swallow and dull your sense of taste. Regular oral hygiene can help keep thrush in check. If necessary, your dentist may prescribe antifungal medications to treat this condition.



Oral Health Problems That May Be Associated With Diabetes

It is not clear if diabetes causes the following oral health problems. More research is needed.

- Dry Mouth (Xerostomia)
- Tooth Decay

Dry Mouth

Some people with diabetes complain about dry mouth. Saliva helps wash away food particles and keeps the mouth moist. Without enough saliva, bacteria multiply in the mouth. When this happens there is an increased risk of tooth decay and gum diseases.

Constant dryness may irritate the soft tissues in the mouth, which can become painful.

Dryness of the mouth can be lessened by using sugarless gum or mints, taking frequent sips of water or melting ice chips in your mouth. If you have drinks with alcohol or caffeine, you may want to have fewer, as they may also worsen the dryness. Your dentist may suggest a saliva substitute or medication that can be used to help relieve dry mouth.

Some products are available over-the-counter at drugstores. Or your dentist may prescribe a medication for you.

Tooth Decay

Everyone is at risk of tooth decay. After you have a meal, snack or drink that contains sugars, the bacteria in your mouth change them into acids that attack tooth enamel.

Repeated acid attacks can cause the enamel to break down and may result in cavities.

Caring for Your Teeth

To reduce the risk of tooth decay, gum disease and other oral infections, brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, for at least two minutes each time. Also clean once a day between your teeth with floss or another interdental cleaner. Choose oral care products that display the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. This assures that a product has met ADA standards for safety and effectiveness. Look for the ADA Seal on products such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, dental floss and other interdental cleaners and mouthrinses.

Your dentist may suggest using an antimicrobial mouthrinse or toothpaste to control gum inflammation. He or she also may recommend rinsing with a fluoride mouthrinse or applying fluoride at home and/or in the dental office to help prevent tooth decay.

Dental Treatment

Regular dental checkups, professional teeth cleanings and periodontal screenings are important to detect and treat dental problems early.

Before dental treatment, let your dentist know:

- if you have been diagnosed with diabetes
- if the disease is under control
- if there have been any changes in your medical history
- the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking

If you need some type of dental surgery, your diet may be affected. Your dentist should consult with your physician about the best way for you to control your diabetes in this case.

Diabetes affects over 20 million Americans. If you have diabetes, it can cause problems with your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart and other parts of your body. It can also affect your teeth, gums and the rest of your mouth. If you control diabetes with a healthy diet and proper medication and you schedule regular dental and medical visits, you are less likely to have these problems.

If you notice signs and symptoms of oral disease, contact the dental office immediately.
Practice good oral hygiene at home, follow your physician's dietary and medication instructions and schedule regular dental checkups for a healthy smile.

For your better health!

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