
Diabetes and your oral health

This fact sheet explains how diabetes can affect your oral health and how maintaining good oral health can positively influence your diabetes.

How does diabetes affect my oral health?

A person with *uncontrolled* diabetes is twice as likely to develop gum disease compared to a person with *controlled* diabetes.

Gum disease not only affects the gums but also the bones which support teeth. Untreated gum disease can therefore lead to tooth loss. For more information on gum disease, ask your dental professional.

How does oral health affect my diabetes?

Gum disease is an inflammatory disease resulting from the presence of dental plaque in the mouth. A long term infection (such as untreated gum disease) can make it hard to control glucose levels.

What should I do to reduce the risk of gum disease?

- Brush with a soft toothbrush twice every day to remove plaque from your teeth and gums.
- Clean in between your teeth daily with floss or interdental brushes.
- Dentures should be cleaned daily to remove plaque.
- Quit smoking to improve your dental and general health.
- Visit your dental practitioner regularly. It is recommended a person with diabetes has a dental checkup every six months.

- Calculus (tartar) build up should be professionally cleaned off your teeth regularly.

Other oral health conditions associated with diabetes

Tooth decay: Diabetes changes the saliva in your mouth. Higher levels of glucose (sugar) are present in the saliva which surrounds the teeth. Tooth decay occurs when the bacteria in dental plaque converts sugar and refined carbohydrates into acid. Therefore, a higher level of glucose (sugar) in the saliva puts teeth at higher risk of tooth decay. For more information on tooth decay, ask your dental professional.

Dry mouth: is an oral complication of diabetes. The cause of this is unknown but may be related to polyuria (the production of abnormally large amounts of urine) or changes in the salivary glands.

Having a dry mouth may increase your risk of tooth decay and gum disease. Your dental practitioner can provide more information and advice if you are suffering from a dry mouth.

Oral infections: Diabetes and dry mouth increases the risk of oral infections such as thrush. Wound healing after extractions or oral surgery may also take longer.

Should I tell my dental practitioner about my diabetes?

Discussing your diabetes with your dental practitioner will help them put together an oral health care plan to assist you in keeping a healthy mouth.

If your dental professional is aware of your diabetes status, appointments can be made for times when your insulin level is most stable (i.e. in the morning).

Remember

- If your gum disease is controlled your blood sugar level is likely to be easier to control.
- If your diabetes is controlled you will have fewer or less severe oral health complications than if your diabetes is uncontrolled.

For more information

- Contact your dental professional
- Visit www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for confidential health advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Email oral_health@health.qld.gov.au

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