

Diabetes and Oral Health – A Two-Way Street

Nearly 30 million Americans have diabetes. While many are aware of the condition's associated risks such as stroke, eye disease and kidney disease, they may be less informed about the important connection to oral health.

In fact, diabetes and oral health can go hand-in-hand: People with poorly controlled diabetes are more likely to develop oral health complications like [gum disease](#), which in turn can contribute to the progression of diabetes. Ultimately, it's especially important for those with diabetes to keep their mouth, teeth and gums as healthy as possible.¹



How does diabetes affect the teeth and gums?

People with diabetes are generally more prone to bacterial infections like gum disease.¹ Experts believe that diabetes can also reduce saliva production, another risk factor of gum disease.⁴

While everyone has some level of bacteria in the mouth, people with poorly controlled diabetes may experience more rapid bacteria growth due to high blood glucose (sugar). Glucose is present in saliva and bad bacteria in the mouth feeds off of it.⁴ When bacteria combine with food particles and other substances, it can form plaque, one of the main causes of gum disease.³

How does gum disease impact diabetes?

Since diabetes decreases the body's ability to fight and resist infection, it can cause gum disease can be more severe and take longer to heal. If left untreated, early gum disease (gingivitis) can progress into a serious gum infection called periodontitis. As the disease worsens, it can destroy the tissues and bone that hold the teeth in place, eventually causing tooth loss.³

Periodontitis may impact the body's ability to control blood glucose (sugar) levels, thus making diabetes more difficult to control.¹

Addressing gum disease

If you have diabetes, there are things you can do to help prevent or manage gum disease.

- Practice optimal oral hygiene. [Follow these steps to keep your mouth, teeth and gums clean and healthy.](#)
- Control blood glucose levels as best as possible.
- Avoid sweets and other empty-calorie snacks, which aren't good for oral health or diabetes. Keep in mind that many beverages contain added sugar, and even sugar-free varieties may be high in acid – another substance that can harm teeth and gums.

Learn more

[Understanding gum disease: What is it?](#)

[Oral health care and prevention](#)

Sources:

¹[Oral Health and Hygiene; American Diabetes Association. September 2012](#)

²[Prevent Diabetes Problems. Keep Your Teeth And Gums Healthy; Colgate Oral Care Center. November 2010](#)

³[Diabetes and dental care: Guide to a healthy mouth; Mayo Clinic. September 2015.](#)

⁴[Diabetes, Gum Disease, and Other Dental Problems; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. September 2014](#)