

Dental Care and Diabetes..... What's the Connection?

Diabetes can cause serious problems in your mouth.

Diabetes is a disease that can affect the whole body, including your mouth. Dental care is particularly important for people with diabetes because they face a higher than normal risk of oral health problems due to poorly controlled blood sugars. The less well controlled the blood sugar, the more likely oral health problems will arise. This is because uncontrolled diabetes impairs white blood cells, which are the body's main defense against bacterial infections that can occur in the mouth.

People with diabetes face a higher risk of:

- **Dry Mouth** - Uncontrolled diabetes can decrease saliva flow, resulting in dry mouth. Dry mouth can further lead to soreness, ulcers, infections, and tooth decay.
- **Gum inflammation (gingivitis and Periodontitis)** - Besides impairing white blood cells, another complication of diabetes is that it causes blood vessels to thicken, which slows the flow of nutrients to and waste products from body tissues, including the mouth. When this combination of events happens, the body's ability to fight infections is reduced. Since periodontal disease is a bacterial infection, diabetics with uncontrolled disease may experience more frequent and more severe gum disease.
- **Poor healing of oral tissues** - People with uncontrolled diabetes do not heal quickly after oral surgery or other dental procedures because blood flow to the treatment site can be impaired.
- **Thrush** - People with diabetes who frequently take antibiotics to fight various infections are especially prone to developing a fungal infection of the mouth and tongue. The fungus thrives on the high levels of sugar in the saliva of people with uncontrolled diabetes.
- **Burning mouth and /or tongue** - This condition is caused by the presence of Thrush.

Steps to keeping your mouth healthy

- Keep your blood sugar as close to normal as possible. If your blood sugar is not being controlled and your physician cannot find a good medical reason for it, have your teeth and gums evaluated by a dental professional. Unhealthy teeth & gums may be the reason for uncontrolled blood sugar.
- Have your teeth and gums cleaned and checked by your dentist at least every 6 months.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush to brush thoroughly and carefully for two minutes after every meal and before bedtime.
- Bleeding gums are not normal, if your gums bleed with brushing or flossing, go to see a dental professional for an evaluation.
- At each dental care visit, tell your dentist about the status of your diabetes.
- Prevent plaque buildup on teeth by using dental floss at least once a day.
- If you wear dentures, remove them and clean them daily.
- If you smoke, talk to your doctor about ways to quit.

Remember,
You can help prevent oral diseases.

