

# Diabetes and oral health



We'll do whatever it takes and then some.

## The Mouth-Body Connection

If you are one of the 16 million Americans with diabetes, you're probably aware that the disease can cause problems with your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart and other parts of your body.

What you may not know is that people with diabetes are more susceptible to developing oral health problems than those who do not have the disease.

### Did you know that diabetes and oral health are linked?

Studies show that people with diabetes are more susceptible to the development of gum (periodontal) disease and other oral health problems than those without diabetes. In addition, research shows that people with diabetes also have more tooth loss.

#### Common oral health problems associated with diabetes

- Oral infections
- Delayed healing
- Diminished salivary flow (dry mouth)
- Tooth decay
- Gum (periodontal) disease
- Taste impairment
- A sensation of a burning mouth or tongue
- Red, tender or swollen gums
- Bleeding gums while brushing or flossing
- Gums that seem to be pulling away from your teeth
- Chronic bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth
- Teeth that are loose or are separating from each other

#### Warning signs for gum disease

Gum disease affects 80 percent of American adults, according to the Academy of General Dentistry. Warning signs that you may have gum disease include:

#### Prevention is the best medicine

Although scientific evidence shows that the state of your oral health is connected to diabetes and diabetic complications, more studies are needed before we can say with certainty what the relationship is. However, we do know that regular dental checkups, professional

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cleanings and good oral hygiene practices can improve oral health and that good oral health contributes to good overall health.

While regular dental exams and cleanings are necessary to remove bacteria, plaque and tartar and detect early signs of oral disease, you can play a major role in preventing gum disease and tooth decay.

- Brush for two to three minutes, twice a day, with fluoridated toothpaste. Be sure to brush along the gumline.
- Floss daily to remove plaque from places your toothbrush can't reach.
- Use a mouth rinse to reduce plaque up to 20 percent.
- Eat a healthy diet to provide essential nutrients (vitamins A and C, in particular).
- Treat dental infections immediately. People with diabetes who combine good dental care with insulin control typically have a better chance of avoiding gum disease.

## If you have diabetes...

- Establish and maintain a healthy mouth. This means brushing and flossing daily and visiting your dentist regularly.
- Make sure your dentist knows you have diabetes and share your complete medical history, including any medications you are currently taking.
- It's a good idea to make morning appointments because blood glucose levels tend to be under better control at this time of day.
- Carefully follow your physician's and dentist's instructions about health care, and reduce or eliminate sugars and starches from your diet.
- Keep track of blood sugar levels to reduce your risk for developing gum disease and other oral health problems.

*Some information courtesy of the Academy of General Dentistry*