

Diabetes and Oral Health

Research suggests that people with diabetes are at higher risk for oral health problems.

Steps You Can Take to Avoid Oral Health Problems Include:

- Reaching your blood glucose (also called blood sugar) targets.
- Brushing and flossing properly to control plaque—a sticky film of food, saliva, and germs that forms on teeth and dentures.
- Seeing your dentist for regular check-ups. Your dentist will tell you how often check-ups are needed.

What Problems Am I at Higher Risk For?

Problems you may experience include:

- Gingivitis (an early stage of gum disease)
- Periodontitis (serious gum disease)
- Thrush (an infection caused by fungus that grows in the mouth)
- Dry mouth (causes soreness, ulcers, infections, and cavities)



Gingivitis

Gingivitis is an early stage of gum disease that causes irritation, swelling, and bleeding in your gums. This can lead to a more serious form of gum disease called periodontitis. When you have gum disease, germs work to destroy your gums (gingiva) and the bone

around your teeth. It starts with plaque and if you don't clean plaque and tartar away, even gentle brushing can cause your gums to bleed. This is called gingivitis.

Dentures can also have plaque that can lead to soreness and other problems with your gums.

Periodontitis

If your blood glucose levels are too high, you are more likely to develop serious gum disease. This is because you are more likely to get a bacterial infection and have a harder time fighting the bacteria in your gums.

If nothing is done, the infection goes on to destroy the bone around your teeth and your teeth may start to move or become loose. When this happens, you may need surgery to save your teeth.

Like all infections, gum disease may be a factor in causing blood glucose to rise and may make diabetes harder to manage and make it harder for your body to fight the infection.

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Dry Mouth

You may notice that you have a dry mouth at times. This may be caused by medicines you take or if your blood glucose levels are high. A dry mouth can increase your risk of cavities because there is less saliva to wash away germs and take care of the acids they create. Dry mouth can also lead to other problems, such as salivary gland infections.

If you have dry mouth, try drinking more water. Some people use saliva substitutes, available at drugstores. Managing your diabetes can also help you prevent or relieve dry mouth caused by diabetes.

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Thrush

Another oral problem associated with diabetes is thrush. Thrush is an infection caused by fungus that grows in your mouth. To control thrush, keep managing your diabetes and if you smoke, quit. Call 1-800-QUIT-Now (800-784-8669) for information on how to stop. If you wear dentures, remove and clean them daily.

What Are the Warning Signs of a Problem?

While your mouth may not hurt, watch out for these warning signs:

- Bleeding gums when you brush or floss. This bleeding is not normal. Even if your gums don't hurt, get them checked.
- Red, swollen, or tender gums.
- Gums that have pulled away from teeth. Part of the tooth's root may show, or your teeth may look longer.
- Pus between the teeth and gums.
- Bad breath.
- Teeth that are loose or moving away from each other.
- Changes in the way your teeth fit when you bite.
- Changes in the fit of partial dentures or bridges.

Should I Tell My Dentist About My Diabetes?

You have special needs, and your dentist and hygienist are equipped to meet them—with your help. Let your dentist and hygienist know about any changes to your teeth or gums and any medication you might be taking. Postpone any non-emergency dental procedures if you are having trouble reaching your blood glucose targets.