

The effect of Diabetes on oral health

Poorly controlled Diabetes will affect oral health as the blood vessels are likely to be narrower than normal, resulting in gums receiving a decreased blood supply, therefore less oxygen, fewer nutrients and less efficient removal of waste products.

This can lead to the following problems:

- Being more prone to develop infections including gingivitis and periodontitis.
- A defective immune system leading to more bleeding gums, pocketing, calculus and bone loss than people without diabetes.
- Infections and wounds taking longer to heal.
- Decreased saliva flow or foamy saliva and dry irritated oral tissues leading to higher caries (decay) rates because of increased dental plaque build up and decreased effectiveness of saliva in buffering the acids that the bacteria in plaque produce.
- Many bacteria thrive on sugars, including glucose, the sugar linked to diabetes so if diabetes is poorly controlled high glucose levels in oral fluids may help bacteria grow leading to increased gum disease.
- In advanced stages periodontal infections can lead to painful chewing problems, loose teeth, altered tooth positions and increased tooth loss.

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Severe periodontal disease may also increase the risk of developing diabetes and may make it more difficult to manage blood sugar levels. Studies have found patients who receive treatment for periodontal disease may be able to manage their diabetes with less insulin.

People with diabetes can have normal healthy gums provided their glucose levels are regularly monitored and kept well controlled and their oral hygiene is good.

Good oral hygiene is essential

To maintain good oral health it is essential to remove plaque from the teeth by daily tooth brushing and flossing. It is important to use a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles to remove plaque from all areas of the mouth without damaging the teeth or gums.

Brush at least twice a day by tilting toothbrush bristles at about 45 degrees to the gums and use a gentle circular motion and a fluoride toothpaste. Your hygienist will demonstrate effective brushing and flossing techniques tailored to the unique situation in your own mouth with personalized oral hygiene aids if necessary. Sometimes antibacterial rinses or gels may also be recommended by your hygienist and dentist.