

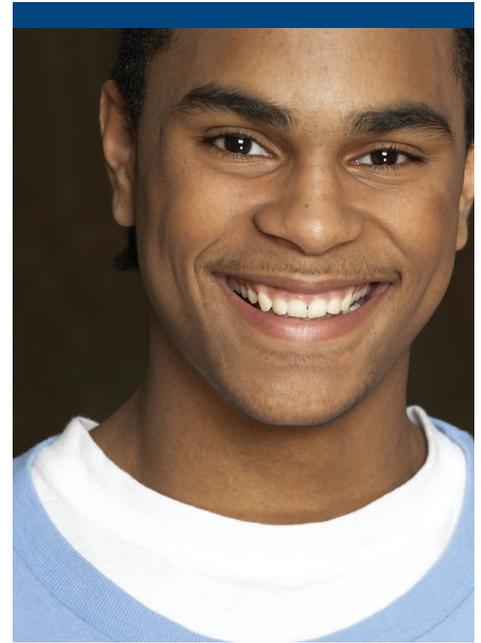
Diabetes and Oral Health

Your dentist sees more than just your teeth.

In some people, the drastic deterioration of periodontal (gum and bone) conditions found during a dental examination has led to the diagnosis of previously undetected diabetes.

Effective oral care routines can reduce inflammation in the tissues around the teeth and may help to improve the control of blood sugar for people with diabetes.

Your dentist has the training and experience necessary to assess your oral health and to determine a course of treatment that is best for you.



Research shows that diabetes and your oral health can affect each other.

This means if you have diabetes, you're at greater risk for developing oral health problems such as gum disease and infections.

On the other hand, having gum disease can intensify the complications associated with diabetes by increasing your blood sugar levels. Blood sugar levels that remain high over a period of time can lead to such complications as premature degeneration of your eyes, kidneys, nerves and blood vessels.

How Your Dentist Can Help

It is important to remember that your dentist is your oral health expert, who has the training and experience necessary to properly assess your oral health. During an oral exam, if your dentist finds signs that you are at risk for diabetes, or that your existing diabetes is not well-controlled, you'll be referred to your family doctor for follow-up treatment or testing.

The good news is that treating either gum disease or diabetes can lead to improvements in the other.

In addition, at your next visit, by telling your dentist:

- if you have been diagnosed with diabetes and if the diabetes is under control
- if you take insulin and when your last usual dose of insulin was administered
- if there has been any other change in your medical history
- the names of all the herbal medicines, prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a medical condition in which the body does not produce nor properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone needed to absorb sugar, the basic fuel for cells. If your body doesn't produce insulin, it cannot use sugars from food. Untreated diabetes can lead to heart disease, kidney disease, nerve damage and infections, and other serious complications.

There are three forms of diabetes:

- **type 1** – the body makes little or no insulin
- **type 2** – the body does not respond properly to the insulin produced
- **gestational** – a temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy.

Symptoms of Diabetes

Some symptoms of diabetes include:

- unusual thirst
- frequent urination
- extreme fatigue
- blurred vision
- frequent or recurring infections
- cuts and bruises that are slow to heal
- tingling or numbness in hands or feet

What is gum disease?

Gum disease is a type of bacterial infection caused by the build-up of plaque, the sticky, colourless film that forms on teeth every day. Gum disease affects both the gums and the bones supporting your teeth. It appears in two forms: gingivitis and periodontitis.

The mild form of gum disease is called gingivitis, in which the gums become sore, red, bleeding or puffy.

Gingivitis can be easily reversed by a visit to the dentist, in addition to the patient working harder at brushing and flossing.

Untreated gingivitis can escalate into what's known as periodontitis. This type of gum disease can lead to the destruction of gum tissue and the bone supporting the teeth.

Oral Health Problems Associated With Diabetes

Through an oral examination, your dentist uses his or her training and expertise to look for certain oral health conditions that could signal a need for you to be tested for diabetes.

The most common oral health problems found in people with diabetes include:

- gum disease (see above for different forms and their symptoms)
- tooth decay
- dry mouth, a condition known clinically as xerostomia
- fungal infections
- lesions in the mouth
- taste impairment
- infection and delayed healing

Am I at risk for diabetes?

If you're 40 or over, you may be at risk for type 2 diabetes, although many people with type 2 diabetes display no symptoms.

Other risk factors:

- obesity, or being overweight
- having a family member with diabetes
- having had gestational diabetes (occurs only during pregnancy)
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol