

Diet, Diabetes, and Tooth Decay

Diabetics susceptible to gum infections

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 diabetics are more susceptible to developing oral infections and gum (periodontal) disease than those who do not have diabetes.

Diet and tooth decay

Your teeth are covered with plaque, a sticky film of bacteria. After you have a meal, snack, or beverage that contains sugars or starches, the bacteria release acids that attack tooth enamel. Repeated attacks can cause the enamel to break down and may eventually result in cavities.

When diabetes is not controlled properly, high glucose levels in saliva may help bacteria and plaque thrive. Plaque that is not removed can eventually harden into tartar. When tartar collects on your teeth, it makes a thorough cleaning of your teeth more difficult, which can lead to chronic inflammation and infection in the mouth.

According to the American Academy of Periodontology, people with diabetes are more likely to have gum disease than people without diabetes. Researchers think this is because diabetes reduces the body's resistance to infection. The gums are among the tissues likely to be affected.

Gum disease is often linked to the control of diabetes. For example, patients with poorly controlled type 2 diabetes appear more likely to develop gum disease than patients who have good control of their diabetes.



What you can do

- Reduce or eliminate sugars and starches from your diet, eat healthy foods, and exercise regularly.
- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean once a day between your teeth with floss or an interdental cleaner to remove decay-causing plaque.
- Keep teeth and gums strong by keeping track of blood sugar levels. Also, have your triglyceride and cholesterol levels monitored.
- Treat dental infections immediately. Diabetics who combine good dental care with insulin control typically have a better chance of avoiding gum disease.
- Provide your medical and oral health histories to both your medical and dental care providers.

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