

Oral Health and Diabetes

“Diabetes can affect the health of teeth and gums...”



What is the public health issue?

Diabetes affects millions of people in the United States, and it is a very serious health problem. There are different types of diabetes, but all affect the way the body can use certain types of foods, such as bread (carbohydrates) that the body breaks down into sugars (glucose). The body needs carbohydrates and glucose for energy, blood flow, and nutrition for the brain. If the body can't use carbohydrates and glucose, the immune system (part of the body that fights off infection and disease) doesn't work as well. People living with diabetes can have many other health problems, such as blindness; sores or cuts that don't heal well; loss of feeling/tingling in the hands and feet; problems during pregnancy; and heart, kidney, and periodontal (gum) disease.

Oral Health in Massachusetts: A Fact Sheet

Diabetes in Massachusetts Adults

- ✓ 319,278 (6.4%) have diabetes
- ✓ 121,326 (32.8%) with diabetes didn't see a dentist in the last year
- ✓ Over 30% of people with diabetes had 6+ teeth missing, versus 12% of non-diabetics

How can diabetes affect dental health?

Unfortunately, gingivitis and periodontal disease affect people living with diabetes more often and more seriously than people who do not have diabetes. Diabetes can cause changes in the teeth and gums, especially when it is not controlled with a proper treatment plan from the doctor. Diabetes increases the risk for gingivitis (small gum infection), and more seriously, periodontal (gum) disease. Gingivitis can go away with good cleaning of the teeth, but periodontal disease is a long-term infection that hurts the gums and bone holding the teeth. If too much of the gums and bone is lost, teeth become loose and can fall out. Diabetes can affect the mouth in other ways by changing the way people taste food; increasing the time it takes the mouth to heal from cuts or sores; decreasing saliva (dry mouth); and increasing risk for other infections in the mouth.

How can you keep your teeth and gums healthy if you have diabetes?

- ✓ See your doctor often
- ✓ Visit a dentist at least every six months (even if you don't have natural teeth) and talk to your dentist about how you control your diabetes
- ✓ Take your medicine(s) and check your blood glucose (sugar) correctly; exercise; and eat proper foods as directed by your doctor
- ✓ Brush twice daily for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste, and floss at least once each day
- ✓ If your mouth feels dry, drink a lot of water, or chew sugarless gum
- ✓ Don't smoke cigarettes and limit alcohol drinks
- ✓ Check your mouth regularly for any problems or changes. See your dentist if your gums bleed when you brush or floss; or if you notice dry mouth, pain, white spots, and/or a bad taste in your mouth

For more information, contact:

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