

Smilematters

PATIENT FACT SHEET

Diabetes and Your Oral Health

Patients with diabetes have special risks related to their oral health care. Poor oral health has also been shown to make diabetes more difficult to control, as infections in the mouth may cause blood sugar to rise. Diabetes can diminish your ability to taste sweets, sometimes leading to increased consumption of sweeter tasting foods which in turn leads to a continued cycle of tooth decay and problems with control of diabetes. It is important to be aware of these potential complications so you can maintain a healthy smile.

Preventing Problems

Good oral hygiene and regular dental visits are important in preventing problems, especially for patients with diabetes. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and flossing once a day helps remove decay-causing plaque, which may be elevated due to high glucose levels. Good maintenance of blood sugar levels and a healthy diet can help boost the body's resistance to infection and gum disease.

Keep Your Dentist Up to Date

It's important to keep your dentist informed on the current status of your diabetes each time you have a dental visit. In order to make informed decisions about your treatment plan, your dentist needs to know:

- if you have been diagnosed with diabetes;
- if the disease is under control;
- if there have been any other change in your medical history;
- the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

Common Oral Health Problems Associated with Diabetes

Patients with diabetes can have increased risk for a variety of oral health problems. It is impor-

tant to make sure your dentist is aware of any changes you may notice in your mouth so that these problems can be addressed as early as possible. Patients with Type 2 diabetes may be up to three times more likely to develop gum disease. Other problems include:

- tooth decay;
- periodontal (gum) disease;
- salivary gland dysfunction;
- fungal infections;
- lichen planus and lichenoid reactions (inflammatory skin disease;)
- infection and delayed healing;
- taste impairment.

Dealing with Dry Mouth

A common complaint among diabetic patients is dry mouth. Without an adequate flow of saliva, soft tissues in the mouth can become inflamed and painful. The risk of tooth decay and periodontal disease is also higher, as food particles are not washed away as well, causing elevated levels of bacteria. Saliva substitutes, sugarless gum or mints, taking frequent sips of water, using ice chips, and reducing caffeine and alcohol intake may help. Your dentist may also prescribe fluoride mouth rinses, as well as topical fluoride to help prevent rampant tooth decay.

Good Communication and Monitoring is the Key to Better Health

Keeping your dentist informed about your diabetes will help your dentist provide you with the best care. Be sure to contact your dentist right away if you start experiencing problems such as trouble chewing, bleeding or sore gums, red or swollen gums, or sore or loose teeth. By practicing good oral hygiene habits and controlling your blood glucose levels, you can enjoy a healthy body and a healthy mouth.