

# DENTAL HEALTH FOR *Diabetics*

PATIENTS WITH DIABETES FACE SPECIFIC DENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES. DR JEAN PAUL DEMAJO EXPLAINS HOW TO TAKE CONTROL



Diabetes is a chronic disease which affects your body's ability to process sugar. The resulting high blood sugar can cause problems with your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart and other parts of your body, including your teeth and gums. Diabetes can lower your resistance to infection and can slow the healing process.

If you have diabetes, you are at greater risk of developing some oral health problems. The most common oral health problems associated with diabetes are:

- **Tooth decay (cavities):** Your mouth naturally contains many types of bacteria. When starches and sugars in food and beverages interact with these bacteria, a sticky film known as plaque forms on your teeth. The acids in plaque attack the hard, outer surface of your teeth (enamel). This can lead to cavities. The higher your blood sugar level, the greater the supply of sugars and starches — and the more acid wearing away at your teeth.
- **Early gum disease (gingivitis):** Diabetes reduces your ability to fight bacteria. If you don't remove plaque with regular brushing and flossing, it will harden under your gum line into a substance called tartar (calculus). The longer plaque and tartar remain on your teeth, the more they irritate the gingiva — the part of your gum around the base of your teeth. In time, your gums become swollen and bleed easily. This is gingivitis.
- **Advanced gum disease (periodontitis):** Left untreated, gingivitis can lead to a more serious infection called periodontitis, which destroys the soft tissue and bone that support your teeth. Eventually, periodontitis causes your gums to pull away from your teeth and your teeth to loosen and even fall out. Periodontitis tends to be more severe among people who have diabetes because diabetes lowers the ability to resist infection and slows healing. An infection such as periodontitis may also cause your blood sugar level to rise, which makes your diabetes more difficult to control. Preventing and treating periodontitis

can help improve blood sugar control.

- **Fungal infections:** Since diabetes compromises your immune system, you may be prone to developing fungal infections such as thrush. Symptoms include painful sores and difficulty in swallowing.
- **Infection and delayed healing:** If you are having extensive oral surgery, implant treatment or bone grafting procedures, your dentist may prescribe antibiotics to minimize the risk of infection. To help the healing process, keep your blood glucose levels under control before, during and after surgery.

## DENTAL TREATMENT

1. **Prevention is better than cure:** Oral hygiene must be at its best. Brushing, flossing, and the use of a medicated mouthwash for gingival health maintenance may also be used. Dental visits every three to four months must be kept up so as to maintain good oral health.
2. **Periodontal treatment:** Routine scalings and deep gingival debridement may be necessary to promote health in periodontally compromised teeth exacerbated by diabetes. Maintenance programmes must be provided and monitored.
3. **Tooth extraction:** Heavily compromised teeth may have to be removed as part of a treatment plan to stabilize the existing dentition and promote health.
4. **Implant treatment:** replacement of extracted or missing teeth to re-establish a normal dentition evening out biting forces and rehabilitating its function and appearance.
5. **Education:** It is very important that patients are educated on the potential oral manifestations of their condition. Patients must be given the right information and shown the right tools to take care of their gums and teeth.

Today, diabetic patients are being treated successfully for all types of tooth and gum conditions. This also includes more specialized implant and bone-grafting procedures. Diabetics that undergo dental implant treatment do not encounter a higher failure rate than the normal population, if the diabetics' plasma glucose levels are controlled.

Control is key! Ask your dentist. 

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