

Diabetes & Oral Health



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The Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health states that Good oral health is integral to general health.

Diabetes & Oral Health

BY SALUD+HEALTH INFO

Good nutrition is important to stay healthy. Almost all foods, nutritious or not, including milk and vegetables, have some type of sugar. Sugars are one form of carbohydrates and are necessary, depending on the kind and the amount, and the number of calories needed for both physical and mental energy. We couldn't live or work without them. Normally, the body needs around 60 to 70 percent of the total calories in the form of carbohydrates.

All the foods we eat are broken down and distributed by the bloodstream. Glucose, the sugar in our blood cells, is carried to all parts of the body. As the sugar gets into the bloodstream, the pancreas releases a hormone called insulin needed to transport sugar from the blood into the body's cells, from where it can be used as an energy source. A sudden increase in the intake of sugar can cause a spike in the blood-sugar level. However, all foods shouldn't be removed from our diets, because many contain important nutrients. To help control the amount of sugar you consume, read food labels and choose foods and beverages that are low in "added sugars."

Diabetes affects how the body uses the food needed for energy. People with diabetes have high blood sugar levels because their pancreas either produces little or no insulin, or the cells do not respond appropriately to the insulin that is produced. Without enough insulin, the glucose stays in the blood. If the glucose cannot get into the cells, it builds up in the blood and overflows into the urine, and passes out of the body, but excess glucose over time can cause health problems related to diabetes such as damage to the eyes, teeth, gums, kidneys and nerves.

Those with diabetes also have lower resistance to infections, reduced capacity for wound healing and slower disease recovery. Although no one knows the cause of diabetes, as it progresses, there can be heart disease complicated by problems of hypertension, stroke and even the need for amputations. Diabetes-associated complications can be prevented, controlled and treated.



The Diabetes Food Pyramid divides food into six groups and gives a range of servings. The Diabetes Food Pyramid is a little different than the USDA Food Guide Pyramid because it groups foods based on their carbohydrate and protein content instead of their classification as a food.

The most common oral health problem with diabetes is gum disease.

Gum disease can happen to anyone and can start at any age. People with diabetes, including children and teenagers, are at an increased risk for serious gum disease, because they are generally more susceptible to bacterial infection, and have a decreased ability to fight bacteria that invade the gums. When diabetes is not controlled properly, high glucose levels in saliva may help bacteria thrive. An increased number of bacteria, along with the remains of food, contribute to the formation of plaque. The built-up plaque causes red, swollen or tender gums that are prone to bleeding during brushing or flossing teeth. When plaque is not removed, it collects above the gum line and eventually hardens (calcifies) into calculus, or tartar that can only be removed by a dentist. If plaque and tartar are not removed, the gums may begin to bleed. This is called gingivitis and is the first stage of gum disease. Gingivitis can create conditions that lead to chronic inflammation and infection in the mouth. If not treated, it can worsen into a periodontal disease. When this stage is reached, the gums begin to pull away from your teeth. Pockets of germs and pus form between the teeth and gums. These deepen and may require gum surgery to save the teeth. If nothing is done,

the infection can advance, destroying the bone around the teeth. The teeth may start to move or get loose. The teeth may loosen and fall out or need to be pulled.

In addition to infection of the gums, high levels of sugar in the saliva may cause other oral problems associated to diabetes such as: thrush, an infection caused by fungus that grows in the mouth, cavities, and dry mouth which can cause soreness, ulcers and infections. If diabetes is poorly controlled, the healing is slower and there is an increased chance of infection after simple procedures or dental surgery.

Current research shows a relationship between serious gum disease and diabetes. High blood sugar levels make people more susceptible to serious gum disease, and having this condition may affect blood glucose control and contributes to the progression of diabetes. Research suggests adding serious gum disease to the list of the main complications associated with diabetes, such as heart disease, stroke and kidney disease.

For the nearly 21 million Americans who have diabetes, many may be surprised to learn about the unexpected complications associated with this condition. Diabetes and gum disease are both "silent diseases" that progress slowly and often without showing symptoms. This highlights the importance of regular check-ups and care. Only a dentist can detect oral health problems.

You should consult your dentist as soon as you have any of the following symptoms of gum disease: red, swollen, tender and bleeding gums; dryness, soreness, white patches, gums that have pulled away from the teeth; pus between the gums when they are compressed; persistent bad breath or bad taste in the mouth; permanent teeth that are loose or moving apart; any change in the way the teeth fit together when the patient bites; and any change in the fit of removable partial dentures.

Good dental health can create a healthy mouth and a beautiful smile for lifetime.

Regular visits to the dentist help maintain good oral health. Dentists can educate patients about risk factors and measures that can be taken to prevent its onset. Your dentist will remove plaque and tartar with professional cleanings and maintain frequent evaluations and preventive measures such as teaching you proper brushing and flossing techniques essential to removing plaque between the teeth. Also, she or he can recommend appropriate toothpastes and mouthwashes for you. This will prevent complications, not only in your mouth, but also in your overall health.



You're the most important person on your health care team

While gum disease may not cause pain, watch for signs and symptoms of oral disease and contact your dentist immediately when a problem arises. If you have diabetes, keeping your blood glucose in your target range, brushing and flossing your teeth every day, and having regular dental checkups are the best ways to prevent gum and teeth problems. If you smoke, quit. Your physician and/or your dentist can help you quit.

Sugars often added to enhance the flavor of smokeless tobacco, can increase the risk of tooth decay. Smoking not only worsens gum disease but may also cause other oral infections and health problems such as oral cancer. Dentists can detect oral cancers at an early stage when they are small and most treatable.

Remember that diabetes can affect several systems in your body. Health care depends on you. Research has shown that people at risk of developing diabetes can prevent or delay the disease with life-style changes recommended to keep the diabetes under control, such as 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week, and eating well balanced diets. Even modest amounts of physical activity help cut the risk of obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes.

If you have diabetes, pay attention to any changes or symptoms as they arise. The best way to care for your health and prevent complications is to consult your doctor, follow his or her directions and visit your dentist at least every six months to review your mouth and detect problems early. Caring for your health will help you enjoy life to the fullest.

Reviewed by: Maricela Murillo DDS, President of the San Diego Women Dentist Association, Fellow of the International Association of Orthodontists, and Member of the American Academy of Craniofacial Pain, and the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine.

"Diabetes and Oral Health Care" is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor. This information is important for everyone who wants to be in charge of his or her health and is available in Spanish.

The Diabetes Food Pyramid divides food into six groups and gives a range of servings. The Diabetes Food Pyramid is a little different from the USDA Food Guide Pyramid because it groups foods based on their carbohydrate and protein content instead of their classification as a food, and makes it easier to remember what to eat. For a healthy meal plan that is based on your individual needs, you should work with a registered dietitian (RD) with expertise in diabetes management. To use interactive technology, visit the USDA Food Guide Pyramid at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>. This is one of many tools that can be used by people who have diabetes or are at risk for developing the disease, to reach their health goals. To learn more about The Diabetes Food Pyramid, please read the article "Using the Diabetes Food Pyramid" adapted by the American Diabetes Association from the book *Diabetes Meal Planning Made Easy* by visiting: <http://www.diabetes.org/nutrition-and-recipes/nutrition/foodpyramid.jsp>

The information in this article is based on the latest information and recommendations for patients from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, the American Diabetes Association, The American Dental Association, and The National Institute of Diabetes and Clearinghouse, a service of the Digestive and Kidney Diseases from the National Institutes of Health.