

# Daily Life with Diabetes

## Diabetes & Oral Health: How to Protect Your Teeth

Diabetes and your teeth may not seem to be linked, but they are.

Having uncontrolled diabetes can boost your risk for oral health problems such as gum disease.

But the link goes the other way, too, most experts believe. If you have gum disease, it may make it harder to keep blood sugar under control. So the diabetes and oral health link is a two-way street.

The good news: taking care of your oral health will help not only your teeth and gums, but perhaps help your diabetes control.

### Diabetes & Oral Health Risks Explained

Having diabetes can make you less able to fight off infection, including gum infections that can lead to serious gum disease.

In early stages, gum disease is known as gingivitis. The gums are swollen, soft, and may bleed, particularly during brushing or flossing.

If gum disease progresses, however, the gums may begin to separate from the teeth, forming pockets that can trap bacteria and boost the risk of infections. Untreated, the infections can destroy the underlying bones that holds the teeth in place. Surgery may be needed.

With diabetes, you may heal more slowly after oral surgery. Your health care provider may prescribe antibiotics to keep post-operative infection at bay. Pay close attention to your blood sugar levels and control before and after oral surgery.

If you have diabetes, you are also at risk for fungal infections in the mouth, called oral candidiasis or thrush. This is true even if you wear dentures.

Dry mouth, called xerostomia, is another common problem among people with diabetes. Saliva is important to oral health -- it helps wash away food particles and keep the mouth moist. When you don't have enough saliva, bacteria thrive, tissues can get irritated and inflamed, and your teeth can be more prone to decay.

### Diabetes & Your Teeth: How to Minimize Risk

Taking care of your oral hygiene at home every day is crucial. Make sure you brush twice a day and floss once a day.

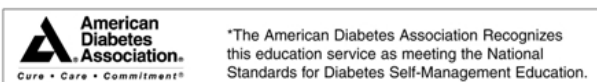
Examine your mouth for an inflammation or signs of bleeding gums. If you notice either, let your dentist know as soon as possible.

Experts recommend having your teeth professionally cleaned every six months, or even every three or four months. Step up the professional cleaning schedule if you know you tend to be lax about home care.

Be sure to tell your dentist that you have been diagnosed with diabetes. It will also help your dentist to know the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you take.

You may want to see a periodontist -- a dentist who specializes in gum disease -- if your gum problems persist or seem to get worse.

**For further information about our Diabetes Education services, call (386)943-4727.**



\*Florida Hospital DeLand and its expansion sites have been recognized by the American Diabetes Association for Quality Self-Management Education.