

Diabetes and oral health

Opinion

Diabetes has become a major healthcare problem with an estimated number of diabetics crossing 20 million. But only two-third of these patients is diagnosed with diabetes. Complications of diabetes include cardiovascular diseases, kidney failure, blindness and lower limb amputation. But gum diseases are among the lesser known complications of diabetes. Many studies have also correlated the susceptibility of diabetics to develop periodontal (gum) diseases and oral infections. Oral infections in diabetic patients tend to be much more severe compared to non-diabetic patients. The diabetics who fail to have good control in their blood sugar levels have higher incidence of oral health problems. Diabetes related oral infections are more common among aging patients and those after puberty.¹⁻³

How is diabetes related to gum diseases?

Many of the complications of diabetes are caused by the loss of resistance by the patient's body to infections. Because of this, gums are also susceptible for higher incidence of infections such as gingivitis. Gingivitis is caused by the bacteria present in plaque. Plaque is sticky substance caused by the action of bacteria on the leftover food particles in your mouth. It accumulates as a film below and above gum line. Without proper oral care and regular dental check-up, gingivitis can lead to severe gum diseases if left untreated. It may also lead to inflammation and result in damage and destruction of tissues surrounding gums, teeth, fibers and bone that hold teeth together with gums.^{2,3}

What are other types of oral problems diabetics can experience?

Other common problems faced by diabetics are burning mouth syndrome the fungal infections such as oral candidiasis and thrush. They may also develop Xerostomia or dry mouth which can accelerate tooth and gum decay. Your dentist may prescribe regular use of antibiotic medicated mouth rinse and also require more frequent cleaning to prevent further problems caused by bacterial infection in the mouth.⁴

How can I maintain oral health?

Diabetics must take extra care of mouth and oral hygiene. Dental infections should be attended to immediately. If diabetes is managed poorly it accelerates development of periodontal diseases. Diabetics who have their blood sugar level and insulin under control and get good dental care have lesser chance of developing gum diseases.⁵ Changes to diet and following a regular exercise regime are the most important steps that the diabetic patients can take to improve their oral health as well as their quality of life. Diabetic patients should ensure that both their medical and dental healthcare providers know their medical history and oral conditions as these are interrelated. Diabetic patients should monitor their blood sugar levels regularly as it has a direct bearing on keeping their gums and teeth strong and healthy. Also, they must have their cholesterol and triglyceride levels monitored on regular basis. These factors have a direct relationship with your propensity to be affected by gum diseases.^{2,4}

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What is the best time to get dental care?

As diabetes can cause dental diseases among other complications, you must talk to both your physician and dentist if your blood sugar and insulin levels are not under control and receive required dental care. Dental procedures should be made as short as possible and must also be stress free. As blood sugar levels are under better control during morning, make appointment for any dental procedures at this time of the day. At the time of scheduled appointment, follow the directions on your food and medication. You must see your dentist on a regular basis and keep him aware of your health status and ensure to keep your mouth and gums in good health.⁶⁻⁸²

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Conflicts of interest

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