

Oral Health & Diabetes

"Diabetes can lead to changes in the oral cavity..."¹



Oral Health in Wisconsin — A Fact Sheet

What is the public health issue?



Diabetes is a disease that affects millions of people and their families.² It currently affects approximately 20.8 million people in the United States, and an estimated 6.2 million of those people have not yet been diagnosed.³ Diabetes is a serious health issue with many

complications. About 60% to 70% of people with diabetes have mild to severe forms of nervous system damage.³ The results of such damage can include impaired sensation or pain in the feet or hands, slowed digestion of food in the stomach, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other nerve problems. Also, more than 60% of nontraumatic lower-limb amputations occur in people with diabetes.³ Furthermore, poorly controlled diabetes during pregnancy can cause major birth defects and spontaneous abortions, and can result in excessively large babies, posing a risk to both mother and child.³ Additional complications of diabetes include heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, and increased susceptibility to illnesses, such as influenza and pneumonia. Overall, the risk for death among people with diabetes is about twice that of people without diabetes of similar age.³



Strategies to Share with Your Patients to Maintain a Healthy Mouth with Diabetes⁷

- ✓ Control your blood glucose.
- ✓ Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste and floss each day.
- ✓ Visit your dentist regularly, and inform him or her that you have diabetes.
- ✓ Quit smoking.
- ✓ Check your mouth regularly for any problems. You should visit your dentist if your gums bleed when you brush or floss, or if you notice dryness, soreness, white patches, or a bad taste in your mouth.

Good Health Practices for People with Diabetes

- ✓ See a physician every three to six months, and visit a dentist at least every six months even if you don't have natural teeth⁸
- ✓ Obtain an influenza vaccine every year during flu season⁸
- ✓ Eat healthy. Construct a personal diabetes food plan with your physician. Eat the correct portions of healthy foods, and eat foods that have less fat and salt.⁹
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight and try to engage in physical activity on most days of the week.⁹
- ✓ Quit smoking.⁹
- ✓ Take your medicines and check your blood glucose correctly, as directed by your physician.⁹
- ✓ Check your feet every day for cuts, blisters, red spots, and swelling. Notify your doctor immediately if you notice any changes.⁹

What is the relationship between diabetes and oral health?

Diabetes can lead to changes in the oral cavity, and uncontrolled diabetes can contribute to uncontrolled gum disease. Poor glycemic control in diabetics is associated with gingivitis and more severe periodontal diseases.⁵ Periodontal disease is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums and bone supporting the teeth. If left untreated, periodontal diseases can lead to tooth loss.⁶ People living with diabetes have about twice the risk for periodontal disease as healthy patients, and almost one-third of people with diabetes have severe periodontal disease with loss of attachment of the gums to the teeth measuring five millimeters or more.³

Periodontal disease may also make it hard for diabetics to control their blood sugar levels.⁷ Oral signs and symptoms of diabetes can include taste disorders, a neurosensory disorder known as burning mouth syndrome, and abnormal wound healing. Additionally, diabetes can lead to oral fungal infections, called candidiasis or thrush. These infections cause painful white patches in the mouth, and are due to increased glucose levels in saliva.⁷ Individuals with diabetes may also notice a fruity (acetone) breath or frequent dry mouth, which can lead to a marked increase in dental decay.⁵

What is Wisconsin doing?

- ✓ Developed Wisconsin Diabetes Mellitus Essential Care Guideline (entire section on oral health).
- ✓ Oral Health Webcast.
- ✓ Communications tool in Guidelines. Our Guidelines took the Scottsdale Report into account.
- ✓ Representative from oral health professionals on the Diabetes Advisory Group.

How is Wisconsin doing?

- ✓ In 2008, 70% of Wisconsin adults with Diabetes reported having at least one dental visit in the past year.
- ✓ 65% of Wisconsin adults with diabetes have lost at least one tooth due to dental decay or gum disease.

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