



# Oral Health Tips

## Diabetes and Oral Health - Take Extra Care of Your Mouth

Tooth and gum problems can happen to anyone. A sticky film full of germs (called plaque) builds up on your teeth. High blood glucose (also called blood sugar) helps germs (bacteria) grow. Then you can get red, sore, and swollen gums that bleed when you brush your teeth. People with diabetes can have tooth and gum problems more often if their blood glucose stays high. You can even lose your teeth. High blood glucose can also damage other parts of the body, such as the heart, blood vessels, eyes, and kidneys. Heart and blood vessel disease can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

If you have diabetes you should know that you are at increased risk for oral infections and gum disease. However, many people who have diabetes are unaware they have the disease. A routine dental exam might uncover the presence of diabetes because the mouth can offer clear-cut signals that the disease is present. Early detection is important because, when left untreated, diabetes can also make you prone to other mouth problems, including fungal infections, poor healing and dry mouth.

You can do a lot to prevent or slow down diabetes problems. Good oral hygiene at home and preventive oral health care is important to slow the progression of periodontal disease and other oral health problems. Regular professional cleanings and dental checkups are a must. And let your dentist know if you have been diagnosed with diabetes.

### Common Problems

- Periodontal (gum) disease and delayed healing
- Tooth decay
- Diminished salivary flow and sensation of burning mouth or tongue
- Dry mouth may also increase tooth decay

- Fungal infections such as thrush produce painful white (or sometimes red) patches in the mouth or on the tongue that may become sore or ulcerated
- Impaired taste
- Those with poorly controlled blood sugar (glucose) may lose more teeth due to periodontal disease than those who have good control of their diabetes, and
- Periodontal disease may make it harder to control your blood sugar levels.

### Common Signs

See your dentist immediately if you notice:

- Gums that bleed easily
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Pus between the teeth and gums when gums are pressed
- Persistent bad breath or bad taste in mouth
- Permanent teeth that are loose
- Any change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Any change in the fit of partial dentures

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### What to Expect at the Dental Office

- To prevent problems with bacterial infections in the mouth, your dentist may prescribe antibiotics, medicated mouth rinses and more frequent cleanings.
- It is recommended that you make morning appointments with your dentist because blood glucose levels tend to be under better control at these times.

### Take Extra Care at Home

- Start by controlling your blood sugar levels to help keep teeth and gums strong
- Brush at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- Floss every day
- Look for early signs and symptoms of oral disease
- Get regular checkups and professional cleanings, and
- Quit using tobacco

### Protecting Your Teeth Through Proper Brushing and Flossing

Learning proper brushing and flossing techniques are an essential part of maintaining good oral health and preventing gum disease.

#### Brushing Technique

Toothbrushing is one of the most effective ways to help remove decay-causing plaque from tooth surfaces.

- Each tooth has three surfaces (top, and two sides) that need to be cleaned.
- Many people underestimate the amount of time they brush their teeth. At least two minutes is recommended, but in reality most people brush for 30 seconds or less. Some electric toothbrushes come with a built in timer.
- Place a soft bristle brush at a 45-degree angle to the tooth and use a gentle massaging action in small circular strokes.

- Brush the outer and inner surfaces of the tooth, including close to the gumline.
- Use the front tip or "toe" of the brush for the inner front tooth surfaces.
- Teeth are covered by a fairly thin layer of enamel that can be worn down by too-vigorous scrubbing. Apply light pressure as you brush.
- Ideally toothbrushing should be done after every meal, but it is most important before bedtime.
- Do not share your toothbrush, it can spread germs.

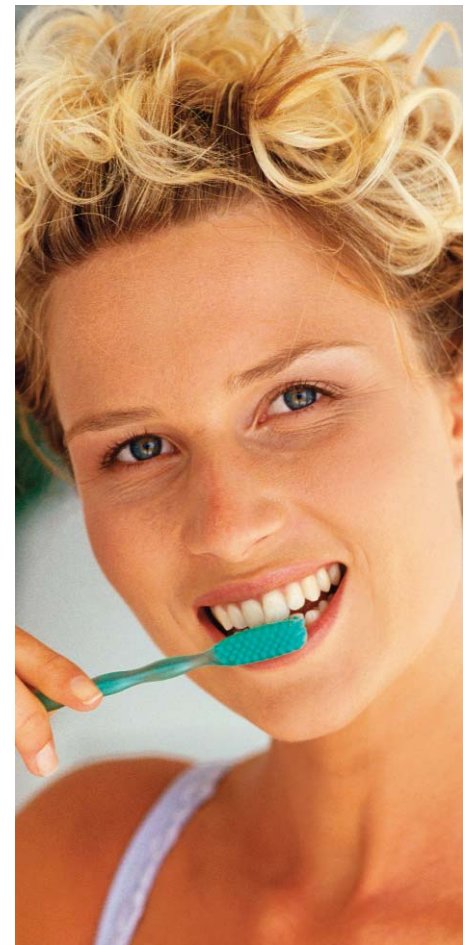
#### Flossing Technique

Brushing alone isn't enough to remove plaque from the tooth surface. Flossing your teeth cleans areas between the teeth cleans the sides of the teeth where the toothbrush can't reach. The space between your teeth (interproximal areas) and below the gumline are two common spots where plaque builds up and the toothbrush cannot reach. If the plaque is not removed the teeth become more susceptible to tooth decay (cavities)

- Use about 18 inches of floss, winding most of it around your middle finger and the rest around the middle finger of your other hand. This finger takes up the used floss.
- Gently guide about an inch of floss, using your thumbs and forefingers, between your teeth.
- Hold floss tightly against the tooth and use a gentle up and down rubbing motion to clean between teeth. Gums can be bruised if floss is "snapped" into place.
- At the gumline, curve floss into a C-shape against sides of both teeth and move it up and down.
- Repeat for all teeth and the back of the last teeth.

### Additional Flossing Tips

- Be gentle when inserting under the gumline. Flossing can injure your gums if done too aggressively or improperly.
- Gum tissue may bleed and be sore for the first few days. Bleeding should stop once all the bacteria are removed.
- Parents should supervise their children's flossing until they can demonstrate the manual hand dexterity to do it on their own. Many children cannot floss properly until about the age of 10.



For more oral health information,  
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[www.deltadentalnc.org](http://www.deltadentalnc.org)