

The Diabetes and Dental Disease Connection

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Diabetes Increases the Risk of Developing Periodontal (Gum) Disease And Periodontal Disease Can Complicate Control of Diabetes – It Can Become a Vicious Cycle

People with diabetes are more likely to have periodontal disease and its complications. Additionally, untreated periodontal disease makes it more difficult to control blood glucose and is associated with increased risk of diabetes complications, including kidney failure and cardiovascular disease.

American Diabetes Association

Implication for Many Medicare Beneficiaries

Diabetes affects approximately 10% of the general population, but about 25% of Medicare beneficiaries. Traditional Medicare does not pay for dental care --- even when it may help control diabetes. Cost and coverage vary widely among Medicare Advantage plans that offer dental benefits, and many plans provide access to only limited preventive care. Periodontal disease can therefore be costly to health as well as personal finances.

Medicare generally does not cover routine or complex dental and/or oral health care, even when such care is essential to the treatment or management of an underlying medical condition (some private Medicare Advantage plans offer limited coverage). The Center for Medicare Advocacy strongly supports adding a comprehensive oral health care benefit to Medicare and expanding coverage for medically necessary oral care, because the mouth is a part of the body and oral health impacts overall health.

The Center encourages Medicare beneficiaries to share their oral health stories and tell elected officials why oral health coverage is important to them. To do so, email the Center at OralHealth@MedicareAdvocacy.org.

Periodontal Disease & Adverse Impact on Diabetes Can Be Minimized – Ideally Prevented

Periodontal disease is a bacterial infection. It can begin subtly with gums that look somewhat red and puffy. That is the start of inflammation. It is the body's response to bacteria in dental plaque, an invisible film that adheres to the teeth. The film can begin to harden if not removed with thorough brushing and flossing. A gritty deposit develops (calculus). That irritates the gums, intensifying inflammation. The normally shallow moat-like space between the top of the gums and teeth begins to deepen as bacteria destroy the fibers (ligaments) that attach teeth to the supporting bone. When the moat-like space is shallow, bacteria can be removed from it with daily oral hygiene. But not as the space deepens. The bacteria, undisturbed, can accelerate their damage. As that progresses and more bone is destroyed the teeth can start to loosen.

As Levels of Blood Sugar Increase, So Does Risk of Infection

People with diabetes are more susceptible to developing infections, including periodontal disease. And the infections can become worse, faster. Healing can also be compromised. It relates to too much sugar (glucose) in the blood.

Cells need glucose. They use it for energy. Some foods, particularly carbohydrates, are converted by the body into glucose. But insulin is needed for the glucose to be absorbed into cells. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas.

In Type I diabetes, the pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin. In Type II, the pancreas produces insulin but cells are not adequately responsive to it so glucose isn't absorbed from the blood. The effect in both types of diabetes is too much sugar (glucose) in blood. That increases susceptibility to infections, impairs healing, and risks damage to the eyes, kidneys, blood vessels, nerves, and the immune system.

**Prevent Dental Infections and the Related Risk of Diabetes Complications
With Daily Brushing and Flossing –
Dental Germs Keep Coming Back, Brush and Floss Daily**

Five Sides of Every Tooth Need to Be Cleaned

Three sides (cheek, biting, and tongue) can be cleaned with a toothbrush. Brush one surface at a time. Go from one side to the other before going to another surface to avoid missing areas. Take your time, a couple minutes. Gums are tender so use a soft bristle toothbrush, and be gentle. Fluoridated toothpastes are recommended to help prevent cavities. A lot of dental problems develop on the two side surfaces between teeth where toothbrushes can't reach. They should be cleaned with floss or other products designed to carefully get between teeth.

Dry mouth

Saliva has many important functions, including protecting against dental disease. Unfortunately, a common symptom of diabetes is a "dry mouth," which can increase the risk of periodontal and other dental diseases. That "vicious cycle" strikes again. To minimize the risk, helpful products are available as rinses, sprays, and gels to moisten the mouth. A dry mouth can occur during sleep, so thorough oral hygiene before going to bed is important.

Dentures

Remove and soak dentures in a cleaning solution before going to bed. Gums below dentures need a chance to rest so sores don't develop. However, if they do develop, don't wear dentures until the sores have a chance to heal. Mouth rinses with peroxide may help prevent sores from becoming infected, but avoid those with alcohol.

The inherent dignity of every person is reflected through a healthy smile.