

Oral health

People with diabetes are at a greater risk of developing gum disease than people who do not have diabetes. These risks can be reduced if blood glucose levels are kept in the target range. Furthermore there are many other ways in which you can protect yourself from gum disease.

What causes oral health problems?

Gingivitis is a common gum disease that is caused by bacteria in plaque. The major symptom of gingivitis is inflamed and bleeding gums. When gingivitis is left untreated it can lead to periodontitis (inflammation of the gums) which can slowly and painlessly damage your gums and destroy the bone that holds your teeth in place. Damage to gums can also cause problems with dentures.

How do I know if I have gum disease?

You may not have symptoms until gum disease is advanced and so regular check ups by your dentist are essential (frequency will depend on whether or not problems such as gum disease are identified).

Other symptoms to watch out for:

- > red, swollen or tender gums that bleed easily
- > gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- > bad breath
- > pus between the teeth and gums
- > loose teeth, teeth moving apart or a change in the fit of dentures

How can high blood glucose levels affect my teeth and gums?

Increased risk of fungal infections

Oral thrush is a fungal infection that is more common when blood glucose levels are higher. It appears as white (sometimes red) patches in the mouth and on the tongue. See your doctor if you think you have thrush.

Dry mouth (xerostomia)

A dry mouth can be from high blood glucose levels or from the diabetes medications. A reduced saliva flow can:

- > be very uncomfortable
- > increase risk of tooth decay
- > cause bad breath (halitosis)
- > cause difficulty in speech and eating
- > cause cracking and bleeding of lips and tongue
- > cause difficulty in holding dentures in place



If you have a dry mouth, drink lots of water. Limit sugary drinks as they may increase the risk of tooth decay. You may find some relief from artificial saliva or creams. Saliva may be stimulated by chewing sugar-free gum, or sucking sugar-free and acid-free sweets. Mouth washes with alcohol are not recommended as they can further dry the mouth.

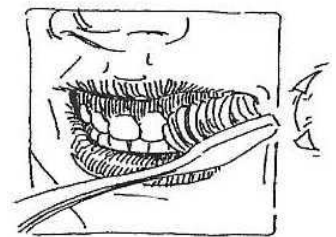
Consult your dental professional if you have a dry mouth.

Increased risk of developing cavities

A gathering of sugars in the fluid between the tooth and gums can increase the risk of developing cavities.

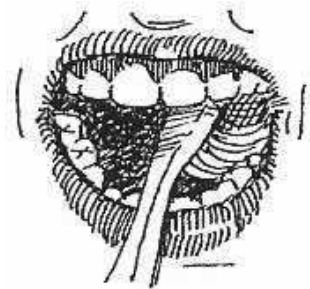
What can I do to look after my teeth and gums?

> Use a small, soft toothbrush to clean your teeth and gums and replace it regularly. Brush your tongue gently.



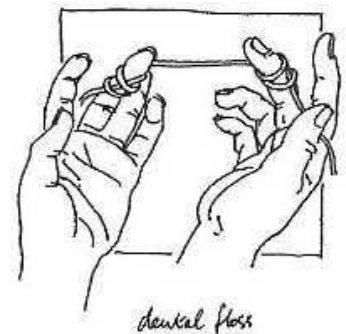
> Thoroughly clean your teeth and gums each morning and before bed at night. This removes bacterial plaque that causes tooth decay and gum disease. Ask your dental professional for advice.

> Use fluoride toothpaste twice a day. Using fluoride toothpaste helps harden the teeth.



> Remember to brush your tongue gently and do not rinse your mouth with water after brushing. Just spit the toothpaste out.

> Clean between your teeth every day using dental floss or special toothpicks. Ask your dental professional to show you how.



> Choose nutritious snacks which are low in sugar and with low acidity.

> Choose plain water or milk as a drink between meals. If you drink tea or coffee, avoid adding sugar.

> Choose medicines, cough syrups and lollies that are sugar-free. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

How often should I see a dentist?

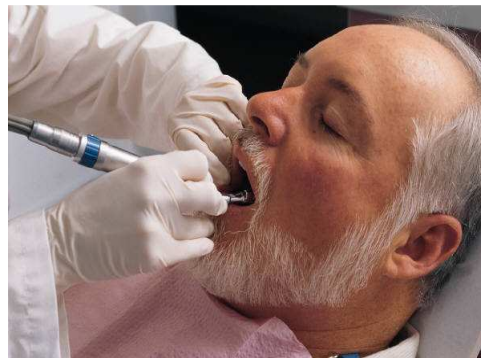
The frequency in which you need to see the dentist will depend on whether there are any problems identified by the dentist. For most people 6 monthly visits will help to prevent minor problems becoming major ones.

If you do not have private insurance or you are finding it difficult to access affordable dental care speak to your doctor about what other options may be available to you.

Ask your doctor about access to dental care through a team care arrangement.

Seek dental care if you have:

- > Gum and periodontal disease gums appear red and swollen and bleed when brushed. If left untreated this disease can cause tooth sensitivity and loss.
- > Oral thrush is a fungal infection that is seen as a white film on your cheeks, tongue and gums. When the film is wiped away the area is red, bleeding and painful.
- > Any unusual lumps, swellings or mouth conditions



Key points to remember

- > Keep your mouth clean, your dentures clean and fitting well and seek regular dental care as recommended by your dentist.
- > Professional cleaning helps to remove tartar build up.
- > Make sure you tell your dentist that you have diabetes.
- > Brush your teeth twice a day and floss once a day.
- > Keep your blood glucose levels as close to target as possible.
- > Be a non smoker.

Where can I go for more information?

Diabetes Outreach www.diabetesoutreach.org/consumer

South Australian Dental Service www.sadental.sa.gov.au

Diabetes Outreach
8 Woodville Rd
Woodville South SA 5011
Telephone: (08) 8222 6775
www.diabetesoutreach.org.au

Disclaimer: This resource is not a substitute for, nor is it intended to replace, the services of a qualified health practitioner.

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