

Oral health

People with diabetes are at greater risk of gum disease. The risks can be reduced if blood glucose levels are kept in the target range. Also there are extra ways in which you can protect yourself from gum disease.

What causes oral health problems?

Gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) is a common problem. The major symptom of gingivitis is inflamed and bleeding gums. When gingivitis is left untreated it can lead to gum damage and can 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 yearly checkups by your dentist are needed.

Other symptoms are:

- > 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 high. 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)

High blood glucose levels and some medications can cause a dry mouth. A reduced saliva flow can:

- > 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.

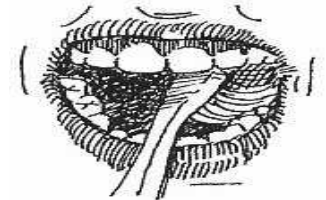
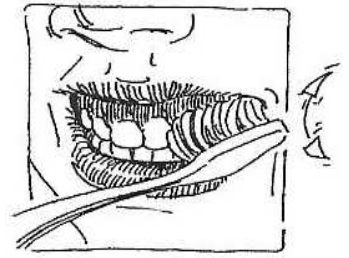
If you have a dry mouth, have frequent drinks of water. You may find some relief from artificial saliva or creams. Saliva may be improved by chewing sugar-free gum, or sucking sugar-free and acid-free sweets. Mouth washes with alcohol are not recommended as they can further dry the mouth.

Consult your doctor if you have a dry mouth.



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

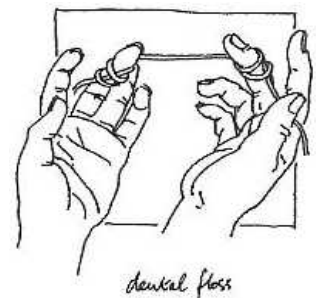
- > Use a small, soft toothbrush to clean your teeth and gums and replace it regularly.
- > Thoroughly clean your teeth and gums with fluoride toothpaste each morning and before bed at night.
- > Remember to brush your tongue gently and do not rinse your mouth with water after brushing. Just spit the 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 as a drink between meals.
- > Choose over the counter medicines, cough syrups and lollies that are sugar-free. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.



How often should I see a dentist?

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 other options available to you through a Team Care Arrangement.



Key points to remember

- > keep your mouth clean, your dentures clean and fitting well and seek regular dental care as recommended by your dentist.
- > seek help early if you notice any unusual lumps, swellings or problems.
- > 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.au/consumer

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

For more information

Diabetes Outreach

8 Woodville Rd

Woodville South SA 5011

Telephone: (08) 8222 6775

www.diabetesoutreach.org.au

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