

# Oral Health and Diabetes

Those diagnosed with diabetes are at a higher risk for oral health problems. These oral health problems can initiate diabetic complications and make it more difficult to regulate blood glucose levels.

## Understanding Diabetes

### Pre-Diabetes

This occurs when the blood sugar levels are higher than the normal range but not yet high enough to be classified as type 2 diabetes. Sometimes, simple changes in diet and exercise can return the blood sugar to a more normal state and prevent development of diabetes.

### Type I Diabetes

Type I diabetes most often develops in young people. With type I diabetes, the pancreas is not able to make insulin, the hormone that regulates blood sugar levels. Insulin injections are needed to regulate the body.

### Type II Diabetes

Type II diabetes usually develops later on in life. Type II diabetes is when the pancreas does not make enough insulin to regulate blood glucose levels, or the body can not properly use the insulin it makes. When this happens the glucose/sugar builds up in the blood. It can be managed by diet, exercise, insulin, and other medications (or some combination of these).

### Gestational Diabetes

This is a temporary form of diabetes that occurs during pregnancy. This could also lead to another form of diabetes for the unborn child or mother after birth, usually type 2.

## Effects on Oral Health

### High blood sugar increases risk of the following conditions:

- **Tooth Decay:** When blood sugar levels are high, there is a greater supply of sugars and acid in saliva, which causes decay of the teeth
- **Gum disease:** Those with diabetes are not able to fight infections as quickly. When the bacteria builds up around the teeth and gums it causes them to become inflamed and red.
- **Periodontal disease:** When gum disease progresses, the bacteria starts to attack the bone under the gums which causes destruction of the bone. The bone is the tooth's support system.
- **Fungal Infections:** These appear as sores or lesion on the tissues or gums which are treated by anti fungal medications.
- **Dry Mouth:** If blood sugar levels are not controlled it can cause dry mouth. The saliva is meant to cleanse the mouth and neutralize the acidity.

## Oral Care **for Diabetes**

- Manage blood sugar levels well
- Have regular hygiene visits for cleaning
- Be health conscious - follow Canada's food guides
- Brush your teeth 3x/day. An Electric toothbrush is preferable
- Floss each night
- Drink lots of water and treat dry mouth as needed
- Use fluoridated tooth paste (Prevident is a good option)
- Avoid mouth rinses with alcohol as they can bring on dry mouth
- Use tongue scraper daily to keep the tongue free from bacteria
- If applicable clean dentures and remove each night to allow tissues to breath.

## How the Hygienist **Can Help**

The dental hygienist will start by updating your medical history at each appointment. He or she can also refer you to physician if diabetes is suspected but undiagnosed or not being regulated properly. The hygienist can recommend specific products to help you care for your teeth, and help ensure you are cleaning your teeth using the proper techniques. The hygienist will also do an intra oral exam to check for any fungal infections that are common with diabetes, as well as assess saliva flow. Finally, he or she will clean the bacteria off of the teeth and below the gums to prevent gum disease and maintain periodontal stability.

### **Sources:**

Health Canada: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)