Oral Health Program

Oral Health and Diabetes

November 2010

What is the connection between oral health and diabetes?

There is a dual connection between oral health and diabetes. Because of high blood glucose, people with diabetes are more likely to have problems with their teeth and gums, including tooth decay, dry mouth and gum disease. To make matters worse, people with diabetes who develop serious gum disease can have a more difficult time controlling their blood glucose.

What is gum disease?

In the beginning stages, gum disease is called gingivitis. Signs of gingivitis are sore, swollen and red gums that may bleed when you brush. Gingivitis can be reversed if treated properly.

A more serious form of gum disease is called periodontitis. At this stage, your gums shrink and pull away from your teeth. Periodontitis is not reversible and can cause bone loss and tooth loss.

Periodontitis is a serious infection and can cause your blood sugar levels to rise, making it harder to control your diabetes.

What are the warning signs of gum disease?

➤ Bad breath or a bad taste that won't go away
➤ Red, swollen, tender or bleeding gums
➤ Pain when chewing
➤ Loose teeth
➤ Sensitive teeth
➤ Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
➤ Changes in the way your teeth fit together when you bite, or changes in the way your dentures fit

How can I prevent dental problems if I have diabetes?

➤ Keep your blood glucose under control.
➤ Brush your teeth often. Brush your teeth at least twice a day, and especially before you go to bed at night. Use a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride.
➤ Floss your teeth daily. Floss your teeth to help remove plaque, a film that forms on your teeth and can cause tooth problems.
➤ Get regular dental checkups. Get your teeth cleaned and checked by a dentist at least once every six months. Be sure to tell your dentist that you have diabetes and let him or her know what medications you are taking. Make sure your glucose levels are in the appropriate range before your appointment.

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