

Diabetes and Periodontal Disease

If you or someone you know has diabetes, you already understand that it is important for diabetic patients to monitor the status of their disease and keep it under control with diet and exercise. However, you may not know that good oral health not only keeps the mouth and gums free from infection, but also might have a significant impact on the control of diabetes.

Periodontal disease and bacterial infections if left untreated, may cause damage to the bone and even tooth loss. Diabetic patients are three-to-four times more likely to develop these types of chronic periodontal infections, which, like any other infection in the body, can impair their ability to process and/or utilize insulin. Infections may cause diabetes to be more difficult to control, and the infection may be more severe than someone without diabetes.

Diabetic patients tend to have a higher incidence of periodontal disease, more severe levels of bone loss and periodontal infection, and often experience acute episodes of more aggressive disease activity, ultimately leading to the loss of teeth. Tooth loss can make it difficult to chew and digest food. For diabetic patients, this can have a devastating impact on the ability to maintain proper nutrition and control of blood sugar levels.

A Two-Way Relationship

Just as diabetes can increase a patient's chance of having periodontal disease, research suggests that periodontal disease may make it more difficult for people to control their blood sugar. Periodontal disease increases the body's systemic inflammatory signals that serve to increase blood sugar. This contributes to increased periods of time when the body functions with an unhealthy blood sugar level. Consequently, it is important for diabetic patients to treat periodontal disease to eliminate the infection for optimal metabolic control.

In addition to increased susceptibility to periodontal disease, diabetic patients, especially uncontrolled patients, may experience other oral conditions such as burning sensations in the mouth or on the tongue, dry mouth, and delayed wound healing.

The American Academy of Periodontology