

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

Expert Q&A: Diabetes and Dental Health

Approximately 1 in 10 of adult Iowans have been diagnosed with diabetes.¹ Diabetes is a serious condition that requires keeping your blood sugar under tight control. Your blood sugar influences every part of your body, including your mouth.

We asked Jeffrey Chaffin, Vice-President and Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa, to explain why maintaining good oral health is especially important for people with diabetes.

Q: How does diabetes affect your dental health?

Dr. Chaffin: When diabetes isn't properly managed, blood sugar levels become high. High blood sugar affects your whole body, including your teeth and gums. High blood sugar weakens your white blood cells' ability to fight bacterial infections throughout your body. White blood cells are the body's main defense system against bacterial infections. This means that people with diabetes have increased chances of developing dental cavities and gum disease.

Q: Why do people with diabetes have a higher chance of developing gum disease?

Dr. Chaffin: People with diabetes have a higher chance of having both early-stage gum disease, called *gingivitis*, and advanced gum disease, called *periodontitis*. Periodontitis is a serious oral health condition, and it is a main cause of tooth loss. The risk for gingivitis and periodontitis is directly related to the glycemic control: This means those with poorer control of their blood sugar tend to have higher levels of gum disease. High blood sugar equates to higher levels of gum disease. Along with the weakened white blood cells, diabetes often results in decreased blood flow to the tissues throughout the body, including the mouth and gums. This decreased blood flow is linked to poorer healing and is related to the development of gum disease and the worsening of gum disease in those who already have it.

Q: Do type 1 and type 2 diabetes affect your oral health in different ways?

Dr. Chaffin: Whether you have type 1 or 2 diabetes, the effects on your mouth and gums can be very similar. The key to prevention is to work with your medical provider to keep your blood sugar under control and ensure that you practice good oral hygiene at home. Good oral hygiene includes brushing at least twice a day, flossing once a day and ensuring that you keep up with your preventive dental visits at least twice a year.

Q: How does taking good care of your oral health help someone better manage their diabetes?

Dr. Chaffin: You should ensure that your dentist knows that you have diabetes so that he or she can tailor your treatment and prevention. Your dentist will not only examine your teeth and gums for cavities and gum disease, but will also keep an eye out for other problems in your mouth that people with diabetes often have. For example, diabetics are at a higher risk for a yeast infection called *candidiasis* (many know this more commonly as thrush). When blood sugars are not controlled, episodes of this yeast infection can be common and painful with patches of redness and bleeding in your mouth.

Q: What are some oral health practices that are especially important when you have diabetes?

Dr. Chaffin: Routine prevention is important for all, but it's even more important for people with diabetes. Diabetics should ensure they make their preventive dental visits and the twice-a-year cleanings. Avoiding tobacco products is very important as well, as smoking increases the risk of serious diabetic complications, including gum disease.

Managing your diabetes is a continuous and critically important process, but you are not alone in this aspect of your health. Although diabetes is serious, you can prevent many of the complications by controlling your blood sugar and working with your medical, dental and vision providers to identify any issues early in their development. This will keep problems minor and prevent them from having a major impact on your quality of life.

5 Tips for a Clean Toothbrush

We rely on our toothbrush to clean our mouths twice each day to scrub away food and keep bacteria at bay, but when's the last time you considered the cleanliness of your toothbrush? Whether it's picking up bacteria in your mouth, on your hands or just by being in your bathroom, your toothbrush sees its fair share of germs. Fortunately, cleaning your toothbrush is really quite simple.

Below are five tips that will help keep your toothbrush (and your mouth!) clean.

Tip 1: Know When to Replace Your Toothbrush

As you probably know, toothbrushes are meant to be replaced. Here are three rules of thumb to know when to replace your toothbrush:

1. Immediately after you've recovered from being sick.
2. Once the bristles become frayed or damaged.
3. If you haven't been sick and bristles are in tact, replace every 3 months (an easy way to remind yourself is to set a reminder on your phone to replace your toothbrush).

Tip 2: Water Works Wonders

Rinsing your toothbrush with tap water and removing any bits of toothpaste before and after you brush will go a long way toward keeping it clean.

Tip 3: Toothbrushes and Toilets Don't Mix

It's an icky but important consideration: Keep your toothbrush at least 6 feet away from your toilet to limit the amount of germs that may find themselves on your brush after you flush. And speaking of flushing, always close the toilet lid before flushing to keep germs from spreading across your bathroom.

Tip 4: Air It Out

After you're finished brushing, allow your toothbrush to air dry by standing it up in a cup or other holder. Don't use a covered holder because that will prevent the brush from fully drying, and this encourages bacteria growth. Also, make sure your toothbrush bristles aren't touching someone else's toothbrush while it's being stored.

Tip 5: Be Selfish With Your Toothbrush

Ever heard the phrase, "Keep your germs to yourself?" Sharing your toothbrush with someone else is a big no-no. Swapping toothbrushes exposes the brush to millions more germs, which then get passed on to you. When it comes to toothpaste, you can share tubes among family members, but don't let the tip of the toothpaste touch your brush.

A Few Toothbrush Disinfecting "Don'ts"

Good intentions aside, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that you should avoid certain toothbrush cleaning practices, including:

- Do not soak your toothbrush in a disinfecting cleaner or mouthwash (it could actually spread germs).
- Don't use an ultraviolet device to remove germs from your toothbrush.
- Do not try to clean your toothbrush in the dishwasher or microwave (you'll likely damage it in the process).

Source:

<https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/faqs/toothbrush-handling.html>