

Want Some Life Saving Advice?

Ask Your Dental Hygienist About Oral Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes

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Citing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), The American Diabetes Association (ADA) reports that diabetes contributed to more than 210,000 deaths in the United States in 2000.¹ Currently recognized by the CDC as the sixth leading cause of death among Americans, as many as 18 million Americans have diabetes and 41 million have pre-diabetes.¹

However, help in detecting diabetes may come from an unlikely source—a registered dental hygienist. Research studies have found a link between periodontal (gum) disease and diabetes. Symptoms of the disease often appear in the mouth, while almost one-third of people with diabetes have severe periodontal disease.¹ This is believed to be a result of the diabetic patient's greater susceptibility to developing infections. Conversely, severe periodontal disease may increase the risk of developing diabetes, and may make it more difficult to manage blood sugar levels. However, studies have found that patients who receive treatment for periodontal disease may be able to control the condition with less insulin.

According to the American Dental Hygienist' Association (ADHA), dental hygienists often detect symptoms of diabetes during routine oral health examinations. Foamy saliva and unusually dry and irritated tissue inside the mouth are tell-tale signs of the condition. And, diabetic patients often lose more teeth compared to patients without the disease.

According to the ADA, diabetes that goes unchecked or untreated can result in serious and life-threatening complications, such as blindness; kidney disease; heart disease and stroke; and nerve disease that can lead to limb amputation.

In addition to helping patients understand the connection between oral health care and overall health, dental hygienists educate patients about proper oral hygiene and treat periodontal disease to prevent the condition from advancing and complicating other diseases.

For more information on diabetes, illnesses related to the disease, and American Diabetes

Month in November, contact the American Diabetes Association Web site at www.diabetes.org.

And for more information about proper oral health care, as well as brushing- and flossing instructions, please ask your registered dental hygienist, or visit the ADHA Web site, at www.adha.org.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National diabetes fact sheet: general information and national estimates on diabetes in the United States, 2003. Rev ed. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004.

Warning Signs of Diabetes:

- Frequent urination
- Extreme hunger
- Unusual thirst
- Extreme fatigue
- Frequent infections
- Blurred vision
- Unusual weight loss

Make an oral health appointment if you notice you experience any of these warning signs of periodontal disease:

- Bleeding gums when you brush or eat
- Red, swollen, or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- Pus between your teeth and gums when the gums are touched
- Change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Persistent bad breath or unusual taste in your mouth.

With research indicating that periodontal disease and diabetes complicate each other, the ADA and ADHA recommend the following:

- Monitor your blood glucose level
- Have your teeth cleaned and checked at least every six months
- Brush at least twice each day to remove plaque, using a soft nylon brush with rounded ends on the bristles
- Tilt the bristles at about a 45-degree angle against the gum line and brush gently in a circular motion
- Brush front and back and also brush the chewing surfaces
- Brush the upper surface of your tongue
- Use dental floss at least once a day to remove plaque and bacteria from between your teeth.

Special floss holders and various types of floss are available to make flossing easier.



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