

# The Link Between Dental & Medical Health



## Good Oral Health is Especially Beneficial to Diabetics

More than 20 million people in the United States have diabetes according to the National Institute of Diabetes, and the percentage of diabetics grows with age. Understanding the importance of oral care in controlling diabetes can help maintain your health – and your health care costs.

People with diabetes are more likely to have gum infections, increasing the possibility of tooth decay, gingivitis and periodontal disease. This is because high blood sugar levels give mouth bacteria more food. A severe gum infection can be slow to heal and can make it hard to control blood glucose levels. In addition, people with diabetes often have less saliva, causing “dry mouth.” Saliva helps get rid of harmful bacteria and when there is not enough, it can lead to bacterial decay.

Living with diabetes puts you at greater risk for gum infections, but taking good care of your mouth will help you maintain your oral health and in turn control your blood sugar.

## Proper Oral Care is Imperative for Pregnant Mothers

The National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine reported that pre-term births are up 30 percent since 1981. Scientific evidence indicates that women with periodontal disease are now nearly eight times as likely to have a pre-term delivery. Understanding the importance of oral care during pregnancy can help reduce the chance for pre-term births and minimize health care costs.

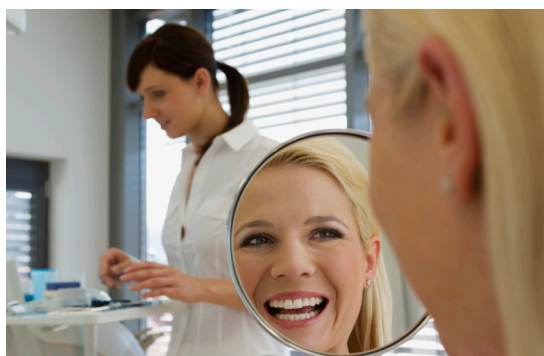
Not long ago, pregnant women were told to avoid going to the dentist. However, research now suggests that hormonal changes in pregnant women place them at a greater risk for gum disease during their pregnancy. The bacteria from gum disease can lead to premature babies and increases the chance of toxemia in expectant mothers.

While women should definitely tell their dentist that they are pregnant and avoid x-rays, it is very important that pregnant women continue to see the dentist every six months. A dentist’s regular cleanings can help avoid gum disease or if gum disease exists, a dentist can help minimize its severity and keep it from worsening during pregnancy.

Pregnancy puts you at greater risk for gum infections and taking good care of your mouth can help you have a healthy, full-term baby.

## Certain Conditions Put Your Oral Health at Risk, but You Can Take Control

*Did you know that some chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease have been linked to oral health? Did you know that patients being treated for head and neck cancer are more at risk for oral health issues? Research shows that a healthy mouth can help deter medical complications, a valuable reason to practice good dental care throughout your life.*



## Oral Health Key During Treatment of Head and Neck Cancers

Good oral health is seen as an important factor in patients being treated for head and neck cancers. These cancers are often treated with radiation and chemotherapy. Both of these treatments can lower the body's ability to fight infection, making the body, and specifically the mouth an easier target for disease. Radiation treatment can also cause "dry mouth." Bacterial decay can follow because there is not enough saliva to rid the mouth of harmful bacteria.

Tell your dentist if you are undergoing chemo or radiation therapy and ask what you can do to keep your teeth and gums healthy.

## Tips for Improving Your Oral Health

### Lifestyle Tips

- Avoid tobacco. Tobacco users are seven times more likely to develop gum disease.
- Sugar and starches should be eaten in moderation.
- Choose foods high in fiber like fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid sipping juices and sodas throughout the day, drink water instead to help wash away the acids created by sugar.

### Visit your Dentist for Regular Checkups

- See your dentist every six months. Tell your dentist your condition and ask what you can do to keep your teeth and gums healthy.
- Call your dentist if your gums bleed when you eat or brush. Also call your dentist if you notice any changes in your mouth such as white or red patches.

### Tips for Brushing

- Brush your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste twice a day for at least one minute each time.
- Hold the brush at a 45-degree angle to your teeth.
- Move the brush back and forth in short strokes over 2-3 teeth at a time.
- Be gentle! Plaque comes off with light pressure. Scrubbing too hard may hurt your teeth and gums.
- Brush the insides, outsides, and tops (chewing surfaces) of your teeth.
- Don't forget to brush behind your front teeth.
- Brush your tongue, it helps prevent bad breath.

### Tips for Flossing

- Floss at least once each day.
- Use approximately 18 inches of floss.
- Wind the floss around the middle finger of each hand.
- Use your thumbs and index fingers to guide the floss between your teeth.
- Gently work the floss between each tooth.
- Curve the floss around each tooth and slide it between the tooth and the gum, rubbing gently.
- Don't forget the back of your last tooth.

### Call your Dentist if you have the Following Symptoms

- Sores, bleeding, redness or swelling in your mouth and gums.
- Pain when chewing or bad odors or taste.
- Holes or dark spots in your teeth or loose teeth.
- Pain in your teeth when you eat something cold, hot or sweet.



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