

Looking after your dental health

Looking after your dental health is important when you have diabetes. Caring for your teeth and gums, and managing your blood glucose levels, can help reduce your risk of dental problems.

Blood glucose levels above the target range increase the risk of dental problems such as tooth decay, gum infections and gum disease.

When your blood glucose levels are high, you may have a dry mouth and more glucose in your saliva. This can lead to the build-up of plaque on your teeth – a sticky film consisting mostly of bacteria. The bacteria produce acids which can damage the surface of the tooth, leading to tooth decay and gum disease. Regular brushing and flossing can help protect your teeth and gums.



Tooth decay

Tooth decay occurs when acids in the mouth damage the outer surface of your teeth. This can lead to a cavity or hole in the tooth. In the early stages of tooth decay, you may not have any symptoms.

Signs of tooth decay include:

- » tooth ache
- » sensitive teeth
- » bad breath and an unpleasant taste in your mouth
- » spots appearing on your teeth.

Gum disease

Gum disease affects most people at some time during their life. Plaque can also irritate the gums, make them red and swollen, and (sometimes) cause bleeding. This can lead to infections that destroy the bone surrounding and supporting your teeth.

High blood glucose levels can cause bacteria to grow, allowing infections to develop quickly and making them more difficult to treat.

Even if you wear dentures, you can still experience gum disease and other dental problems. In the early stages, gum disease is usually painless and many people don't know they have it.

Helpline 1300 136 588

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Signs of gum disease include:

- » bleeding gums when you brush or floss your teeth
- » red, swollen or tender gums
- » bad breath
- » a dry mouth or oral thrush
- » teeth that are loose or moving away from each other
- » gums that have pulled away from the tooth, so that the tooth's root is showing, or the tooth looks longer
- » changes in the way dentures fit.

If you notice any signs of tooth decay or gum disease, make an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible.

Looking after your dental health

There are several things you can do to reduce dental problems.

- » Keep blood glucose levels within your target range. Talk to your doctor and diabetes educator about how to achieve this.
- » Brush and floss your teeth every day. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and a soft toothbrush.
- » See your dentist at least once a year. Tell your dentist you have diabetes and let them know if you have noticed any signs of gum disease.
- » Don't smoke. If you do smoke, try and quit. If you feel you can't give up smoking on your own, ask for help – talk to your doctor or call the Quitline on 137 848.
- » Make healthy food and drink choices. Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods and limit foods and drinks that are high in added sugars. Choose water as the best everyday drink.



Tips for looking after your dentures

If you wear dentures:

- clean them every day
- place a washer or water in the sink to avoid breaking your dentures if you drop them
- rinse them thoroughly under water each night, clean them with a soft denture brush, then soak them in a recommended denture cleaner to help eliminate any remaining food
- remove them after each meal and rinse your mouth with water
- brush your gums gently with a soft toothbrush to stimulate blood circulation
- don't clean your dentures with toothpaste, bleaching products, ammonia-based cleaners, abrasives or very hot water, as this can damage them
- make sure your dentures fit properly, otherwise they might damage your gums and increase your risk of infection
- visit your dentist at least once a year: they will assess the health of your gums, look for pressure spots, and check the fit of your dentures.

The NDSS and you

The NDSS provides a range of services to help you manage your diabetes. These include our Infoline and website for advice on diabetes management, NDSS products and a range of support programs to help you learn more about managing your diabetes.

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