



Diabetes and periodontal (gum) disease Information for GPs

As diabetes is the fastest-growing chronic condition in Australia, it is imperative that any factors increasing the risk of development or progression of the disease are managed effectively.

Periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory gum disease that leads to destruction of the bone supporting the teeth, and ultimately tooth loss. It is the oral equivalent of the diabetic ulcer and can result in a significant inflammatory burden affecting the regulation of the insulin pathway. Nearly a quarter of Australian adults are diagnosed with moderate or severe periodontitis.¹

Many patients living with diabetes are unaware of the two-way relationship between diabetes and periodontal disease. Treating periodontal disease can help improve blood sugar control in patients living with diabetes, slowing its progression. And when diabetes is diagnosed and well controlled, periodontal disease is much more successfully managed.

GPs can advise patients with diabetes about the links between the two conditions and ensure that regular dental visits are an essential part of their diabetic management, alongside feet, eye and kidney care.

The two-way relationship: Diabetes and periodontal disease

- Diabetes puts people at greater risk of periodontal disease, as prolonged elevated blood glucose levels can contribute to the development and progression of this chronic inflammatory disease
- Patients with periodontal disease have an increased risk of pre-diabetes and Type 2 diabetes²
- Diabetes can delay intra-oral healing and increase the risk of oral infections
- Patients with diabetes have a higher risk of cavities due to decreased saliva (xerostomia)
- Periodontal disease can cause significant inflammation, affecting regulation of the insulin pathway, increasing the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and making it harder for people with diabetes to control blood sugar levels.

Oral health tips to share with patients with diabetes

- Visit your dental professional regularly and make sure they know you have diabetes
- Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste to remove dental plaque, and protect against gum disease and cavities
- Floss or use interdental cleaners daily to remove dental plaque from between the teeth
- People with dentures should rinse them with water after each meal and clean them thoroughly each day with a denture brush and recommended denture cleaner. Dentures should be left out overnight or for several hours during the day. Brush gums with a soft toothbrush to keep the mouth clean and healthy
- Make healthy food and drink choices – tap water is the best drink for good oral health
- Don't smoke. A doctor or dentist can help with quitting or call the Quitline on 137 848.

References:

1. Zhang et al. Diabetic and cardiovascular risk in patients diagnosed with periodontitis. *Aust Dental Journal* 2015; 60: 455-462.
2. Chauhan et al. Diabesity and periodontal disease: Relationship and management. *Diabetes and Primary Care Aust* 2016; 1(2) pcdsa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/DPCA-1-2_59-63_wm.pdf