

Diabetes and Your Oral Health

Prevention of Gum Disease

This leaflet includes information on

- Diabetes and dental problems
- The causes of gum disease
- How you can prevent gum disease
- How the dental team treats gum disease
- How SDCEP produces guidance to improve dental health

Why have I been given this leaflet?

One of the complications of diabetes is an increased risk of developing gum disease. Gum disease may also make it more difficult to control your blood glucose. This leaflet explains the ways in which you can reduce your risk of developing diabetes-related gum disease.

What is gum disease?

Gum disease, also known as periodontal disease, is caused by a build up of plaque on the teeth. If plaque is not regularly removed by brushing, the gums can become irritated and inflamed. Plaque which is not removed eventually hardens into a substance called calculus which is also irritating to the gums. Calculus has to be removed by your dentist or hygienist.

Gingivitis

The early stage of gum disease is called gingivitis. The symptoms are swollen, red gums which bleed easily when you brush, floss or eat hard foods, such as apples. You may also notice an unpleasant or metallic taste in your mouth. A relative or friend may complain that you have bad breath. Gingivitis is reversible with good oral hygiene.

Periodontitis

If gingivitis is left untreated, it can develop into a more advanced stage of periodontal disease called periodontitis. If left untreated, periodontitis can lead to receding gums, loose teeth and eventual tooth loss.

Can I prevent gum disease?

Most people can prevent gum disease with good oral hygiene. The table overleaf lists some key things you can do to improve your oral hygiene and prevent gum disease.

Recommendation 1

Brush your teeth regularly and effectively

Improving your oral hygiene reverses the early stages of gum disease. Your dentist or hygienist can help by showing you how to brush your teeth in the most effective way.

Recommendation 2

Have a plan of when you will brush your teeth

Having a firm plan will help you remember to brush your teeth. For example, you could plan to always brush first thing in the morning when you get up and last thing at night when getting ready for bed.

Recommendation 3

Use an ordinary toothbrush or a rechargeable powered toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste

Rechargeable powered toothbrushes may remove more plaque than ordinary toothbrushes. However, both types of toothbrush are good for removing plaque if they are used properly.

What else can I do?

- Stop smoking

Stopping smoking reduces your chance of getting gum disease.

- Clean between your teeth using floss or interdental brushes

Flossing in addition to toothbrushing may make gums less likely to bleed. Using interdental brushes in addition to toothbrushing may remove even more plaque.

What will the dental team do?

- If you need to improve your oral hygiene, your dentist or hygienist can show you the best ways to remove plaque from your teeth. They can also help you plan when you will do this at home.
- If you have periodontitis, your dentist will show you how to improve your oral hygiene and will recommend that you have treatment to remove the build-up of plaque and calculus on your teeth. You may need intensive treatment that will take place over several weeks.
- If you smoke, your dentist will advise that you consider stopping.
- Your dentist will recommend that you ensure your diabetes is well-controlled, as uncontrolled diabetes increases your risk of developing gum disease.

Why has this leaflet been developed?

SDCEP has recently provided guidance for dental healthcare staff on the best ways to prevent and treat gum disease. SDCEP guidance is developed by groups that contain clinical experts, researchers and patients. This leaflet explains how patients can also make a difference to the health of their gums.

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