

# Diabetes and Oral Health

By Dr Matthew Fleming & Dr Dana Horng



## Tooth Decay and Diabetes

When diabetes is not controlled properly, glucose can be found in both saliva and in fluid released between the gum and tooth. If the glucose level in saliva is high, this can help bacteria thrive, and begin the tooth decay process. This is why we still diagnose decay with poorly controlled diabetic patients, even though they are brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and cleaning once a day between their teeth with floss.

## Periodontal disease and Diabetes

Periodontal disease refers to infections of the gum and bone that hold your teeth in place. Periodontal disease is often linked to the control of diabetes, because this chronic condition reduces the body's resistance to infection; the gums are among the tissues likely to be affected. It is possible to have periodontal disease and not have all of the warning signs, which is why it is vital to have regular preventive dental appointments.

Due to the lowered resistance and a longer healing process, periodontal diseases often appear more frequently and more severely among persons with diabetes. That's why good maintenance of blood sugar levels, a well-balanced diet that meets your needs, good oral care at home, regular dental check-ups and periodontal examinations are important.

## Dry Mouth and Diabetes

Saliva helps wash away food particles and keeps the mouth moist. Without adequate saliva, bacteria continue to colonise. Xerostomia, or dry mouth, is a common complaint among diabetic dental patients. Constant dryness irritates the soft tissues in the mouth, often making them inflamed and painful.

This condition greatly increases the risk of tooth decay and periodontal diseases.

Your dentist may recommend a saliva substitute that can be used for relief from dry mouth discomfort. Your dentist may also recommend rinsing with a fluoride mouth rinse, or having a topical application of fluoride at home and in the dental office, to help prevent rampant tooth decay. Using sugarless gum, sugarless mints, taking frequent sips of water or using melting ice chips may help alleviate a dry mouth. Restricting intake of caffeine and alcohol can also assist.

Other Oral Health conditions linked with Diabetes

Oral candidiasis [thrush], a fungal infection in the mouth, appears to occur more frequently among persons with diabetes, including those who wear dentures. Your dentist may prescribe antifungal medications to treat this condition. Lichen planus is a skin disorder that produces lesions in the mouth. A more severe type of Lichen planus involves painful ulcers that erode surface tissue. Although there is no permanent cure, your dentist may prescribe a topical aesthetic or other medication to reduce and relieve the condition.

At Hartwell Dentistry we provide our patients with ultimate treatment, making sure we use the best option for our patients' specific circumstances. If you, or a family member have diabetes, please see us! We will certainly work with you to help you manage these risk factors as best as possible.

Dr Matthew Fleming is the Principal Dentist at Hartwell Dentistry. Along with his wife, Dr Dana Horng, together they are dedicated to progressive care - for your ultimate care and comfort. *They can be reached on (03) 9889 3245 or [reception@hartwelldentistry.com.au](mailto:reception@hartwelldentistry.com.au).*

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