

# Link between diabetes and oral health

Nearly 24 million Americans have diabetes—and almost one-third of this population has severe periodontal (gum) disease.<sup>1</sup> Because diabetes limits the body's natural ability to fight off infection, good oral health habits are especially important to keep diabetes in check.

## Why oral health matters

Statistics show that among young adults, those with diabetes have about twice the risk of gum disease as those without diabetes.<sup>1</sup> Diabetics are also more likely to experience periodontal destruction at an earlier age than non-diabetics.<sup>2</sup> Gum disease can also complicate diabetes by altering blood glucose levels.

## What you should know

Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Poorly controlled diabetes can lead to serious complications such as heart disease, blindness, amputations, nerve damage, and kidney failure.

Research shows that people with diabetes who receive more professional oral cleanings are healthier and can better manage their blood glucose levels. It appears that for every one-point reduction in blood glucose levels, there is a 40 percent reduction in risk of diabetic complications of the eye, kidney, and nervous system. A one-point reduction also appears to lower the occurrence of heart attack by 14 percent and diabetes-related deaths by 21 percent.<sup>4</sup>

## What you can do

Practicing good oral health habits, such as brushing and flossing regularly, is important. In addition, see your dentist regularly and learn how professional cleanings may be able to help you better manage your diabetic condition.

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National diabetes fact sheet: general information and national estimates on diabetes in the United States, 2007.

2 J Periodontol. 2001 Nov;72(11):1485-90.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm>, accessed March 2010.

4 Wagner E.H. et al. Effect of Improved Glycemic Control on Health Care Costs and Utilization. JAMA, Jan. 10, 2001, Vol. 285, No. 3.