



# Diabetes & Dentistry YOU

## Advice for Parents of Children with Diabetes: Build a Care Team

If you are the mother or father of a child with diabetes, you already know that it is life-altering disease. You also know that managing blood glucose levels and getting the best care possible are paramount in ensuring that your child has a chance to live a normal, healthy, active life.

If you have lived with a child of diabetes for any length of time, you recognize this complex and body-wide condition cannot be treated without help. But have you ever considered that, in order to ensure the best quality care for your child, you may need a team of professionals working with you?

According to the American Diabetes Association, the first step in ensuring good, up-to-date diabetes care for your child is building a health care team. The make up of that team may vary, depending upon the level to which you personally can be involved in the details of your child's care. It also depends upon your child's individual needs. However, at the core of any diabetic care team, you

should have:

### Do children and adolescents with diabetes get periodontal disease?

13.6% of diabetic youngsters between the ages of 13 and 18 were found to have periodontal disease. While for non-diabetics, the incidence was less than 3%!

A **medical doctor** specializing in diabetic care, who acts as the head of the care team. The MD creates the overall diabetic management plan, prescribes and monitors medications, and tests A1C, blood pressure and cholesterol levels periodically.

A **diabetic educator** focuses on helping you integrate healthy habits into your entire family. She spends time with you and your child helping you understand the biology behind diabetes, how to check blood glucose levels. And perhaps most importantly, she works closely with your entire family to help you make changes toward health for your child.

A **dietitian** is an expert in food and nutrition. He helps you and your child create and commit to a healthy diet. You should consult a dietitian at least once a year to get help in adapting your child's eating plan as she grows and changes, or as her diabetes treatment program changes.

### One More Core Team Member

One member of the team you may not have thought of is a **dentist** trained specifically in diabetic care.

Like many health issues related to diabetes, oral health is both difficult to maintain without help, AND yet it is highly important to do so. Unlike many other parts of the body, the mouth is a site where bacteria is constantly present — brought in by the food we eat, the air we breathe and even the light kiss of a loved one. This is normally not a problem against your body's defenses — saliva that moves bacteria out of the mouth regularly, healthy teeth and gums nourished with adequate, bacteria-fighting white blood cells. And of course proper oral care in the form

### Diabetes and Oral Health:

Patients with diabetes who do not practice good oral health and blood sugar management are five times more likely to have severe periodontal disease — including bone loss.

of daily brushing, flossing and visits to the dentist.

However, young people with diabetes have two things working against them when it comes to oral health. First, they are often still learning how to take proper care of their teeth and gums. Brushing twice a day for two minutes at a time and flossing every day just aren't priorities in their lives. Second, as with diabetics of all ages, infections grow more quickly and heal more slowly than in non-diabetics. In fact, a study published in the Journal of the American Dental Association, showed that **13.6% of diabetic youngsters** between the ages of 13 and 18 were found to have **periodontal disease**. While for **non-diabetics** in the same age group, the incidence was **less than 3%!** That same study found that the disease rate grew to 39% for

### How can bacteria from my mouth damage organs in the rest of my body?

According to experts, pathogens involved in gum disease have evolved virulence factors that allow for direct tissue invasion. It is this characteristic that may enable these bacteria to invade other organs of the body and cause damage to the them.

diabetics between the ages of 19 and 32 – while the control group remained steady at less than 3%.

Of greater concern than their predisposition toward contracting periodontal complications for young people with diabetes is the impact this infection of the gums can have on the child's overall health.

Researchers have found that periodontal disease combined with moderate to poor glycemic control can create an ongoing, system-wide burden of inflammation and infection on the body. This burden can throw glycemic levels out of

safe ranges and leave the patient vulnerable to other complications of the heart, kidneys, eyes and other organs.

Further, because diabetic control and periodontal health often work against each other, children (as well as adults) with diabetes may require dental visits as often as four times a year in order to remove calculus and bacteria below the gum line and to remove or treat infected tissue. This treatment is best performed by a dentist trained in diabetic care and experienced in helping patients manage blood glucose levels through proper dental care.

## Treatment From a DentistryForDiabetes Dentist: What to Expect

The diabetic dentist understands the physiology of diabetes, the various medical drug treatments, blood glucose testing, and how oral health impacts the overall health of the person. He is often part of a team of professionals in their fields, who work together to treat patients with diabetes. However, you do not need a referral from a medical doctor in order to see a diabetic dentist.

### What to expect during your visit with a diabetic dentist

With that in mind, a diabetic dentist will test blood glucose levels (HbA1C test) at each appointment and ask if there has been any change in your condition



since the last appointment. He will also want to know if you are taking any new medications. And prior to performing any invasive

or prolonged dental procedure, he will test your stress level. He will then treat any superficial symptoms of tooth decay, inflammation, and discomfort, followed by deep probing treatment for any underlying infections of the mouth – removing diseased tissue and often washing the area with antimicrobial rinse to reduce bacteria.

### Choose a diabetic dentist

If you are a diabetic, make sure you choose a dentist trained specifically in diabetic dentistry to ensure that both your oral health and overall health are understood and treated appropriately.

## Oral Health & Treatment:

In general, the morning hours are the best time for patients with diabetes to have routine dental work done. The reason is that blood sugar levels are at their most stable following the morning meal and medicine.