



Diabetes & Dentistry YOU

No Laughing Matter Diabetes & Oral Health

Diabetes is certainly no laughing matter? But did you know that if diabetics do not visit their dentists often enough, it could affect their smile? . . . and their health?

According to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Dental Association* (2000), diabetics are up to 3.4 times more likely to contract oral health complications than non-diabetics. What's worse, diabetics are less likely to see a dentist on a regular basis for preventative treatment than are non-diabetics.

The reasons for this reluctance by diabetics stems from several things. Chief among them, however, are time constraints and cost.

Diabetes Costs Time and Money

Diabetes is a system wide disease with complications that range from heart disease to podiatric ailments (foot problems, due to diabetes's affect on circulatory functions). Diabetics are kept busy, and are often painfully aware of their disease on a daily basis. In order to

get and stay healthy, they need to manage their glucose levels and dietary intake, get regular exercise and (for those with insulin-dependence) inject themselves with insulin up to four times a day.

They also visit their medical doctor and the emergency room more often than non-diabetics.

In fact, per capita medical expenses for patients with diabetes are 2 - 10 times higher than those of non-diabetic patients (White BA, Little SJ. Dental utilization and cost among diabetics in an HMO. *J Dent Res* 1998;77:653.).

It's Simple

All of this adds up to a group of individuals, who are already spending significant time, effort and money on their health, due to their diabetic state. Add to that a marked lack of awareness among diabetics about the affect of diabetes on oral health (and oral health's effect on diabetes) and it is clear why many diabetics simply do not see their dentists as often as they should.

Ironically, that choice could end up costing them more money and more time than preventive dental visits, while hurting their overall health.

TABLE 4

DIABETIC SUBJECTS' RESPONSES TO THREE ORAL HEALTH KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS.			
QUESTION	RESPONSE (%)		
	Yes	No	Not Sure
Does your dentist know that you have diabetes?	88.8	3.1	6.4
Do you believe that your oral health would be better if you did not have diabetes?	18.2	44.1	37.4
Have you ever been told by a health care professional that you should be extra careful to brush, floss and see a dentist often because you have diabetes?	27.1	67.7	5.1

Source: DIABETES AND ORAL HEALTH PROMOTION: A SURVEY OF DISEASE PREVENTION BEHAVIORS; *Journal of the American Dental Association.*, 2000. Vol. 131, No. 9, 1333-1341.

Diabetes and Oral Health:

Why Prevention May Cost Less

Diabetics are more susceptible to tooth loss, gingivitis, periodontitis and oral soft-tissue pathologies, due in large part to the same reasons they are susceptible to other classic complications such as heart disease and retina disease.

In addition, because diabetics (especially those with poor glucose management) experience delayed wound healing and inhibited immune response, bacteria born oral disease such as gingivitis, periodontal disease, oral fungus, etc. hit diabetics more often (up to 3.4 times more likely

to contract gum disease than non-diabetics) and with greater damage including tooth loss, alveolar bone loss and soft tissue damage.

A Two-Way Street

But the damaging affects of oral diseases and diabetes are two-way. While oral health is severely impacted by poor glycemic control and inhibited immune response, oral infection can bounce glucose levels out of control. Which supports what the US Surgeon General says, "oral health and general health are inseparable" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Oral

Health in America 2000).

The point is that it is far less expensive and much better for the patients overall health to visit a dentist regularly for preventive management of oral health and diabetes. It is difficult to quantify the amount of time saved by visiting a dentist for 30 minutes 2-4 times a year vs. undergoing extensive oral surgery to repair or replace teeth and gums. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the patient would save significant time and reduce stress on their overall health by visiting a dentist trained in diabetic treatment for regular preventive care.

Wildebeests, Vultures & Oral Health: What They Have in Common

What do your mouth and a wounded wildebeest have in common?

They can both fall prey to opportunistic attacks.

The wildebeest is fine as long as it is healthy and strong. But soon after it begins to stumble from injury or illness, the vultures appear. First one, then two, then 10, and so on. Until there are more vultures than you can count.

Oral Candidiasis

That is the way oral candidiasis works. Your mouth is pink, healthy and strong, until you stop managing your blood sugar for long stretches or you develop salivary dysfunction due to diabetes. Both of which weaken and make your mouth vulnerable to oral health diseases. When that happens, *Candida Albicans*



(a normally harmless microorganism that lives in your mouth) multiplies quickly. And before you know it a fungus has spread throughout your mouth creating a white or yellow film on tongue and palate that covers painful lesions and sores. And it sometimes causes burning mouth syndrome, a painful and unending prickly sensation.

Frankly speaking, it is awful to see but worse to experience. It makes eating painful as it is

impossible to keep food from scraping across the raw and open wounds.

Treatment

Fortunately, treatment is available in the following combination:

- Topical and systemic antifungal
- Saliva replacement therapy (if needed)
- Blood glucose tested and managed to healthy ranges
- Thorough, regular examinations

. . . All of which should be administered by a dentist trained in proper care of diabetics .

Remember, immediate treatment will rid you of this awful disease today. But long-term management and rigorous dental care are important in preventing this and other oral diseases from returning.

Oral Health & Treatment:

Topical antifungals are the drug of choice for localized candidiasis in patients with normal immune function. However, systemic antifungals are used for those patients immune deficiency disorders such as cancer and diabetes mellitus.