

Gum Disease in Diabetes

Gum disease is one of the lesser-known [complications](#) that can affect patients with diabetes.

It is estimated that 1 in 3 diabetics suffer from periodontitis at some stage of their disease.

What does gum disease have to do with diabetes?

When diabetes is poorly managed, it can lead to or accelerate the development of periodontal diseases in both children and adults.

[Higher than normal blood glucose levels](#) cause higher than normal levels of glucose in the saliva which creates a fertile breeding ground for bacteria and in turn raises the risk of dental decay and gum disease.

What are the symptoms of gum disease?

The symptoms may include the following:

- Bleeding in mouth stimulated by brushing and/or flossing
- Swollen, red or tender gums
- Gums in recession
- Loose teeth
- Presence of pus between teeth/gums
- Changed bit or jaw alignment
- Persistent bad breath

To obtain an accurate diagnosis, consult a dental health expert.

What forms of gum disease could I be suffering from?

Gum diseases are usually classified according to the level to which the disease has advanced. These are as follows:

- [Gingivitis](#): Gingivitis is the mildest form of gum disease, and is characterised by swollen, red or tender gums. This may cause them to bleed easily during standard dental health care routines such as brushing and flossing. Gingivitis can usually be averted by a dentist, and by following a home dental health care program.
- [Periodontitis](#) (Mild): When gingivitis goes untreated, it may lead to mild periodontitis. This stage of the disease will begin to erode the bone around the tooth. In order to prevent further erosion, it will be necessary for the patient to have prompt medical attention.
- [Periodontitis](#) (Severe): This is the most advanced stage of gum disease, and is characterised by significant tissue and bone loss around the teeth.

Risk factors for gum disease

The following factors raise the risk of developing gum disease:

- Regularly [high blood glucose levels](#)
- Insufficient oral hygiene
- [Smoking](#)
- Viral infections
- Certain medications - including some blood pressure medications may also increase risk
- Having any condition that affects immunity - such as Addison's disease or HIV

Diagnosis of gum disease

If you have the symptoms of gum disease, your dentist can provide you with a diagnosis and advice on treating gum disease.

Developed forms of gum disease such as periodontitis will require a dental examination to assess the scale of the problem. X-rays may be required to assess damage to the jaw or to the parts of teeth below the gum line.

How is gum disease treated?

Treating will involve maintaining strong oral hygiene and keeping your blood sugar levels well managed. Quitting smoking is also highly recommended to limit further damage.

Brushing your teeth twice a day in the morning and evening and flossing your teeth daily can help to keep your teeth clean. Mouthwash may also be recommended by your dentist and you may need to visit a dental hygienist.

Good blood glucose control can be achieved by joining a [diabetes education course](#) and using [blood glucose testing](#) to inform meal choices.

Antibiotics or painkillers may be prescribed for treating acute necrotising ulcerative gingivitis. Surgery may be required if gum disease is severe.

Severe periodontitis may require surgery to remove or replace gum tissue.

How will my periodontal disease be treated?

Periodontal disease is treated amongst diabetics in the same way as other patients. However, the specific treatment will be assessed depending on a variety of factors.

These will include the extent of the disease, your diabetes control and your tolerance of medications.

Following an assessment, and depending on the severity of the disease, a variety of techniques may be employed.

These can include:

- Plaque removal
- Medication
- Surgery
- Dental implants and
- Soft-tissue grafts

What other oral problems may be caused by diabetes?

Unfortunately, the scope of diabetes to cause other oral problems is not limited to gum disease.

Diabetes may also cause [oral thrush](#) through [high glucose levels](#) in the mouth.

Dry mouth and all of the related problems that occur with it may also affect patients with diabetes.

How do I prevent gum disease and oral problems?

An appropriate dental health programme including regular brushing and flossing can go a long way to preventing oral problems associated with diabetes.

Managing your blood sugar well will also help to reduce the risk of developing periodontitis. Also, periodontitis can work the other way: as regular gum infections could impact upon [blood sugar](#) control and increase the risk of further diabetic complications.

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