

Diabetes: The Mouth/Body Connection

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People with diabetes are more likely to have periodontal (gum and bone) disease than people without. The American Diabetes Association states that about 20% of Americans (13 million) are affected by the disease. About half (5.2 million) are undiagnosed and don't know it, and of those that do, only half have it under control. The rate is 1.5 times higher in Latinos, and 24% of Mexican Americans have diabetes.

Periodontal disease is rare in the normal population before the age of 20, but increases steadily to 60% in the 45-54 age bracket. In diabetics, 30% of twenty year olds have periodontal disease, going up to 50% by age 35, and 80+% in the 45-54 age group! According to the American Academy of Periodontology, the rate of periodontal disease in diabetics is double that of the non-diabetic population.

Research has emerged that suggests that the relationship between periodontal disease and diabetes goes both ways - periodontal disease may make it more difficult for people who have diabetes to control their blood sugar.

Severe periodontal disease can increase blood sugar, contributing to increased periods of time when the body functions with a high blood sugar. This puts diabetics at increased risk for diabetic complications. Thus, diabetics who have periodontal disease should be treated to eliminate the periodontal infection.

This recommendation is supported by a study reported in the *Journal of Periodontology* in 1997 involving 113 Pima Indians with both diabetes and periodontal disease. The study found that when their periodontal infections were treated, the management of their diabetes markedly improved.

Are you at risk? Periodontal disease can be addressed by your dentist and blood tests for the detection of diabetes by your physician, right?

There is another option. Currently there are a number of Centers for Dental Medicine throughout the country that are working to bridge the gap between medicine and dentistry and offer whole health strategies to assess risk factors, educate and provide for effective home care, as well as treat the periodontal concerns.

The question posed by the American Dental Association in a joint conference with the American Medical Association was, "Who benefits from medicine and dentistry working together? The patient!"

If this makes sense to you, or for more information on the oral-systemic connection, please call A Unique Dental Experience®, Center for Dental Medicine at 254-4000, or visit www.drdell.com.