

Health

A link between oral and overall health?

By Dr. Rick Borquez

Diabetes affects 18.2 million people in the United States and is expected to double by the year 2010. Additionally, diabetics who do not have good control over their blood sugar levels are more susceptible to oral health problems than non-diabetics, according to a study that appears in the November/December 2004 issue of *General Dentistry*, the Academy of General Dentistry's clinical, peer-reviewed journal.

Oral health symptoms of diabetics include dry mouth, periodontal (gum) disease, oral infections, cavities and delayed wound healing.

When salivary glands do not work properly, dry mouth occurs, which leads to decay and other oral health problems. Diabetics can prevent dry mouth by increasing water intake, chewing sugarless gum and visiting a dentist regularly for personalized treatment options.

Diabetics have an increased risk for developing periodontal disease,

a result from gingivitis. Bacteria in plaque can cause inflamed gums which can destroy tissues surrounding the teeth gum and bone.

Most of the time periodontal disease is treatable. It is suggested that patients get



their diabetes and diet under control and visit the dentist more frequently for proper cleanings.

Wound healing time is another

major concern for diabetics because of elevated blood sugar levels. Gum disease, sores—everything will heal slower for patients with diabetes.

Patients should make morning appointments because blood glucose levels tend to be under better control at this time of the day. Dental procedures should be as short and as stress free as possible.

The oral symptoms of diabetes:

- Bad breath and bleeding gums are often indicators

- Dry mouth (xerostomia) also may develop, causing increased tooth decay

- Receding gums has been found to occur more frequently in moderate and poorly controlled diabetic patients because plaque responds differently in diabetics.

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