

Research suggests that there is a two-way relationship between severe gum disease and diabetes. Not only are people with diabetes more susceptible to gum disease, but it can affect blood sugar levels and make diabetes harder to control. Diabetics are also prone to a number of oral health complications such as dry mouth, thrush (oral fungal infection) and oral sores. To help avoid these complications schedule routine oral health check-ups and talk with your dentist about your diabetes.

## How can diabetics prevent dental problems?

To help avoid complications take good care of your oral health, maintain good diabetic control, avoid smoking and, if you wear dentures, remove and clean them daily.

## Oral Health Tips For Diabetics

- Brush 2-3 times a day and floss daily
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- See your dentist for regular checkups
- Include an oral health assessment as part of your routine diabetes management
- Your dentist and hygienist are important members of your medical team, talk with them about your diabetes and any other medical conditions you may have



## How Can I Prepare For My Next Checkup?

People with diabetes have special needs and your dentist and hygienist are equipped to meet those needs—with your help. Keep your dental team informed of any changes in your condition or any other medical condition you may have and bring a list of any medications you are taking.

## Warning Signs

- Gums that bleed when you brush or floss
- Gums that have pulled away from teeth or that are red and swollen
- Loose or separating teeth or pus between your teeth and gums
- Changes in the way your teeth fit together
- Changes in the fit of partial dentures

Visit [diabetes.org](http://diabetes.org) for more information

## About Delta Dental of Washington

Since 1954, Delta Dental of Washington, has worked to improve oral health in Washington state by emphasizing preventive care and making dental coverage more affordable. With nearly 90% of Washington dentists in-network, Delta Dental gives you the most choice to find your favorite dentist. With 59 million members and 142,000 providers, Delta Dental is the #1 choice in dental benefits nationwide.

## About Washington Dental Service Foundation

The mission of the Washington Dental Service Foundation, funded by Delta Dental of Washington, is to prevent oral disease and improve the overall health of Washington residents. Working closely with partner organizations the Foundation develops and implements innovative solutions that provide lasting benefits to our state's residents in the following areas:

- Early intervention and prevention of oral disease
- Improving access to dental services
- Increasing households that have fluoridated drinking water, a safe and cost-effective way to reduce tooth decay
- Advocating for sound oral health policy

For more information about Delta Dental of Washington, the Foundation and their programs please visit [DeltaDentalWA.com](http://DeltaDentalWA.com).

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# GOOD ORAL HEALTH IS IN

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# OVERALL HEALTH

Everyone wants a healthy, beautiful smile. But did you know the health of your teeth and gums can impact your overall health? Research shows that your mouth is a window to the health of your whole body.

Gum (periodontal) disease in particular has been linked to heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Maintaining good oral health is one of the smartest things you can do for your body.

## Are you taking care of your oral health?

- Brush twice a day using fluoride toothpaste and floss daily
- Visit your dentist at least once a year, inquire about oral cancer screenings and wear lip balm with sunscreen
- Limit frequency of snacking on junk food and sugary foods and beverages. Give your teeth a break and allow them to recover from snacking acid attacks
- If you wear dentures, remove and clean daily
- Avoid any kind of tobacco use and limit alcohol consumption



## Do you have any of these warning signs?

If so, consult with your dentist, as these may be signs of serious dental issues.

- Red, swollen, tender, or bleeding gums or gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- Loose or separating teeth or pus between your teeth and gums
- Persistent bad breath that doesn't go away
- Changes in the way your teeth fit together when you bite or the fit of your dentures
- Mouth sores that bleed easily or don't go away within two weeks
- Color changes inside your mouth
- Mouth pain or a lump or thickened area
- Difficulty chewing, speaking, swallowing or moving your jaw

# HEART HEALTH

Gum disease is bad for your heart. In fact, people with gum disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from heart disease as those with healthy gums. Research has shown that harmful bacteria in the mouth can also make you more susceptible to developing blood clots throughout the body, which can then lodge in your heart (heart attack), brain (stroke), or lungs (pulmonary embolism).

## What is gum disease?

Gum disease is a chronic bacterial infection in the mouth that can cause tooth loss, or worse, if left untreated. What is it exactly?

- Plaque is a sticky film that forms on your teeth
- Bacteria live in plaque, and attack the gums and supporting bones
- If plaque isn't removed daily, gums can become infected, swollen, and tender
- Irritated gum tissue can separate from your teeth, forming pockets
- Bacteria invade these pockets, further irritating your gums, and destroying teeth and supporting bone



## Is gum disease avoidable?

Yes. Maintaining good oral health is key to preventing gum disease. Remember to brush and floss daily and visit your dentist for regular cleanings and exams.

## DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth isn't just an issue effecting seniors. It is a common side effect of many over-the-counter and prescription drugs used by people of all ages and unfortunately, can complicate or worsen oral health. If left untreated, dry mouth can lead to bad breath, cavities, and diseased gums.

If you have dry mouth:

- Sip water throughout the day
- Chew sugarless gum
- Use a humidifier in your room at night
- Use a saliva substitute or oral moisturizer
- DO NOT stop taking your medications and consult your dentist or physician

# ORAL CANCER

Your dentist is often the first line of defense against oral cancer. Your dentist can examine your mouth for precancerous signs and do a simple brush biopsy to check for cancer in the early stages when it is most treatable. When caught early, most types of oral cancer have a more than 80 percent five-year survival rate.

## Are you at risk?

- 90 percent of people with oral cancer use some form of tobacco
- Frequent alcohol consumption combined with tobacco use further increases cancer risk
- More than 30 percent of patients with cancer of the lip have outdoor jobs and excessive exposure to sunlight
- A strain of the human papilloma virus (HPV) has been shown to cause oral as well as cervical cancers



## Do you have any of these warning signs?

The most common warning sign of oral cancer is a sore on the lips or in the mouth that bleeds easily and will not heal. If you have a sore that lasts over two weeks have it checked by a dentist or physician. Also look for:

- Changes in tissue color in your mouth
- Mouth pain or tenderness
- Lumps or thickened areas
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving your jaw
- A change in the way your teeth fit together

## Want to know more about the link between oral and overall health?

1. Visit [DeltaDentalWA.com](http://DeltaDentalWA.com)
2. Look for "About Us" at the bottom of the page
3. Click on "Improving Health"