

DO YOU HAVE DENTAL DIABETES? MAYBE!

Dear Dr. McCrummen: I have been told that I have early signs of diabetes but feel healthy. What is diabetes and how would I know if I had it? I thought it was detected when a kid, or in old age? Can diabetes be the reason my gums bleed, even though I floss and brush each day?
P.W.

A person can have many types of diseases and feel healthy, such as, heart disease, cancer, gum disease, HIV (AIDS), tooth decay (cavities), and diabetes. One does not often feel disease until it is in the advanced stages. More than 20 million people in the US have some form of diabetes, and over 6 million of them do not know they have it yet.

Diabetes is a serious disease related to poor insulin production by the pancreas. Without insulin, sugar (your body's fuel) does not leave the blood to allow your body to function normally. High blood-sugar can easily be tested with inexpensive and virtually painless home devices. High blood-sugar can lead to serious heart, kidney, eye, foot and oral disease, and many other complications.

There are at least four types of diabetes. Warning signs can include, frequent hunger or thirst, blurred vision, unexpected weight-loss, itchy or dry skin, fatigue for no reason, frequent urination, tingling or numbness in the hands or feet, slow healing of injuries, also, oral fungal infections, gum disease, dry mouth, burning mouth syndrome, bad breath, and oral surgery complications.

Dental signs of diabetes and gum disease can include, gums that bleed easily, red and swollen gums, receding gumline (shrinking away from the teeth exposing the roots), pus, or milky-white, or yellow debris around the gums and between teeth, loose teeth, foul breath, and bad taste. Pain is a late, advanced stage symptom.

Periodontal (gum) disease is the sixth main complication of diabetes and it is 4 times more likely to develop in a diabetic than a non-diabetic. Periodontal disease is often painless as the gums and bone around the teeth become infected, and teeth are lost. Dentures do not fit well if teeth are lost to bone disease, as there is no support for them. Denture-wearing diabetics often have pain and frequent sores from the rubbing of dentures on the gums.

Diabetes makes it easier to get gum disease, and due to delayed healing from diabetes it makes gum disease very difficult to control. Gum disease also makes it hard for a diabetic to control their blood-sugar which can cause more complications. It has been found that treating gum disease can decrease insulin requirements.

All people, especially diabetics, should do all that they can to prevent gum disease, and maintain good oral health, for the sake of future comfort, reduced health expenses, and good whole-body health.

The organisms from oral (gum) disease have been found to contribute to many other diseases, and to affect many organs, such as the heart, blood vessels, pancreas, liver, lungs, and can even

lead to low birth weight babies, pre-term births, joint replacement and surgical complications, and infection. Gum disease causes chronic inflammation and infection which taxes the immune system and can contribute to the bad effects of cholesterol.

Your oral health is very important in many ways. It is not wise to interpret no pain as no problem. Be proactive about your health, and do it for you.