Diabetes: Understanding the connection

Watchmen Daily Journal · 16 Jul 2026 · DR. JOSEPH D. LIM

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the body's ability to regulate blood sugar levels.

While its impact on organs, such as the heart, kidneys and eyes is wellknown, many people are less aware of the significant effects diabetes can have on oral health.

Maintaining good oral hygiene is essential for people with diabetes, as there is a two-way relationship between blood sugar control and oral health.

People with diabetes are more susceptible to oral health problems because elevated blood glucose levels can weaken the body's ability to fight infections.

This makes the gums and oral tissues more vulnerable to bacterial infections, leading to conditions such as gingivitis and periodontitis.

Gingivitis is the inflammation of the gums, causing redness, swelling and bleeding. If untreated, it can progress to periodontitis, a more severe infection that affects the bone and tissue supporting the teeth, potentially resulting in tooth loss.

Dry mouth, or xerostomia, is another common oral health issue in people with diabetes. High blood sugar can reduce saliva production, leading to a dry, uncomfortable mouth.

Saliva is essential for neutralizing acids, washing away food particles, and preventing tooth decay. Without adequate saliva, the risk of cavities and oral infections increases.

In addition, dry mouth can make chewing and swallowing difficult and may contribute to bad breath.

Oral health problems can, in turn, make diabetes more difficult to manage.

Periodontal or gum disease triggers inflammation in the body, which can affect insulin sensitivity and make blood sugar levels harder to control. This creates a cycle where poor oral health exacerbates diabetes, and poorly controlled diabetes worsens oral health issues. Breaking this cycle requires diligent oral hygiene, regular dental visits and effective diabetes management.

Preventive care is crucial. People with diabetes should brush their teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, floss daily and rinse with an antimicrobial mouthwash if recommended by a dentist.

Maintaining regular dental check-ups — ideally every six months — is essential for early detection and treatment of any oral issues. Dentists may provide professional cleanings and advice on managing dry mouth, gum disease and other diabetes-related oral conditions.

Diet and lifestyle also play a key role in protecting oral health. A balanced diet low in refined sugars and high in fiber can help maintain stable blood sugar levels while supporting healthy teeth and gums.

Staying hydrated is important to combat dry mouth, and avoiding tobacco products reduces the risk of gum disease and oral cancer.

Education is another essential component. People with diabetes should be aware of the signs of oral problems, such as persistent bleeding, swollen gums, loose teeth, or mouth sores that do not heal. Early recognition and prompt intervention can prevent complications and improve both oral and overall health.

Oral health and diabetes are closely interconnected.

High blood sugar can increase the risk of gum disease, dry mouth and infections, while poor oral health can complicate diabetes management.

By prioritizing good oral hygiene, maintaining regular dental visits, managing blood glucose levels, and making healthy lifestyle choices, individuals with diabetes can protect their oral health and improve their overall quality of life.

Awareness, prevention and early intervention are the keys to ensuring a healthy mouth and a healthier body.

Dr. Joseph D. Lim, Ed. D., is the former Associate Dean of the College of Dentistry, University of the East; former Dean, College of Dentistry, National University; Past President and Honorary Fellow of the Asian Oral Implant Academy; Honorary Fellow of the Japan College of Oral Implantologists; Honorary Life Member of the Thai Association of Dental Implantology; and Founding Chairman of the Philippine College of Oral Implantologists. For questions on dental health, e-mail jdlim2008@gmail.com or

Dr. Kenneth Lester Lim, BS-MMG, DDM, MSc-OI, graduated Doctor of Dental Medicine, University of the Philippines, College of Dentistry, Manila, 2011; Bachelor of Science in Marketing Management, De La Salle University, Manila, 2002; and Master of Science (MSc.) in Oral Implantology, Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany, 2019. He is an Associate Professor; Fellow, International Congress of Oral Implantologists; and Fellow, Philippine College of Oral Implantologists. For questions on dental health, e-mail limdentalcenter@ gmail.com./WDJ