

# Diabetes and Your Oral Health

**If** you have diabetes, taking care of your teeth and gums is an important part of staying healthy. According to the National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, people with diabetes are at a greater risk for mouth infections than the general population, especially periodontal disease.<sup>1</sup>

Periodontal disease is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums and bones supporting the teeth. As the disease progresses, gums may separate from the teeth, opening pockets that may become infected. Eventually, periodontal disease can damage the bone that holds your teeth in place and may lead to painful chewing problems -- you could even lose your teeth! Additionally, certain studies suggest that severe periodontal disease is also associated with making it more difficult for diabetics to control their blood glucose levels (blood sugar).<sup>2</sup>

Diabetes can also cause other dental problems such as dry mouth and a fungal infection called thrush, which results in painful white patches throughout the mouth. Dry mouth happens when you reduce the normal amount of saliva produced in your mouth. Saliva is a fluid that keeps your mouth wet, helps digest food, and keeps the bacteria in your mouth under control. Diabetes may also cause the glucose level in your saliva to increase.<sup>3</sup>

Take steps to keep your mouth healthy. Visit your dentist regularly and remember these tips:<sup>4</sup>

- Keep your diabetes in check—watch your diet, take your prescribed medications, keep a regular exercise routine, and monitor your blood glucose levels.
- Brush and floss every day.
- Watch out for any changes in your oral health, such as sore gums or a change in the way your dentures fit, and be sure to discuss these changes with your dentist.
- Keep your dentist up to date about any medications you may be taking.

## *Did You Know?*

- *Periodontal disease is more common in people with diabetes. Among young adults, those with diabetes have about twice the risk for periodontal disease when compared to those without diabetes.*
- *High blood sugar levels may make periodontal disease worse. At the same time, periodontal disease can make diabetes harder to control.*

*By controlling your blood glucose, brushing and flossing everyday, and visiting a dentist regularly, you can help prevent periodontal disease and help control your diabetes.*

*Source: American Diabetes Assoc., [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).*

Just because you have diabetes doesn't mean you'll have oral health problems. But it's helpful to understand how your diabetes may affect your overall health—including the health of your mouth. Ask your physician or dentist about any other questions you may have about your diabetes or oral care.

This brochure is intended for your general knowledge. This information is not a substitute for visiting a dentist nor does this information replace advice given to you by your physician or dentist. By making this information available to you, MetLife is not engaged in rendering any medical or dental advice.

<sup>1</sup> National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, "Prevent Diabetes Problems: Keep Your Teeth and Gums Healthy," [http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/complications\\_teeth/index.htm](http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/complications_teeth/index.htm). Accessed 02/04/08.

<sup>2</sup> Janet H. Southerland, DDS, MPH, PhD, George W. Taylor, DMD, DrPH, and Steven Offenbacher, DDS, PhD, MMSc, "Diabetes and Periodontal Infection: Making the Connection," *Clinical Diabetes*, 2005, 23:171-178.

<sup>3</sup> ADA Division of Communications, "Diabetes and Oral Health," *Journal of the American Dental Association*, 2002, Vol. 133, No. 9, 1299.

<sup>4</sup> National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, "Diabetes: Dental Tips," <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/HealthInformation/DiseasesAndConditions/DiabetesAndOralHealth/DiabetesDentalTips.htm>. Accessed 02/04/08.