Diabetes threatens our oral health!

Diabetes not only affects patients' general health but also damages their oral health.

If diabetic patients' blood sugar levels are not well controlled, they are more susceptible to oral diseases such as gum disease. Gum disease is the disease of the tissues surrounding the teeth. When dental plaque accumulates along the gum margin over a long period of time, the bacteria in the dental plaque release toxins that irritate the periodontal tissues (tissues surrounding a tooth) including the gums, periodontal membrane and jaw bone, etc., leading to gum disease. In addition, uncontrolled oral diseases may further aggravate the diabetic condition.

Some diabetic patients experience increased hunger, thirst and urination, along with weight loss. They also get tired easily and are prone to infections. However, the early stage of diabetes is symptomless, the disease is often discovered incidentally during a medical checkup or inspection for other medical complications.

If you are a diabetic patient, how to prevent diabetes-related oral diseases (e.g. gum disease)?

Patients with gum disease may have bad breath, swollen and bleeding gums, gum recession and other symptoms. Severe gum disease can result in exposure of the tooth root surfaces, leading to the sensitive feeling during eating and difficulty in chewing.

Diabetic patients have a lower healing ability, so it is more difficult for their gum disease to heal. Therefore, effective prevention must be taken early.

Control your blood sugar level

Poor control of blood sugar levels in the long term often leads to many medical complications. As a result, the diabetic patients will have lower body resistance, making them more susceptible to bacterial infections that can trigger gum disease.

Take good care of your gums and teeth

To prevent gum disease, you need to foster good oral care habits. Diabetic patients not only need to remove the dental plaque by brushing the teeth properly in the morning and at night, but also need to use dental floss or appropriate oral care aids daily to remove the plaque at the adjacent tooth surfaces.

Toothbrushing

1. Choose a soft-bristled brush. In general, the length of a brush head suitable for an adult should be the same as the diameter of a one-dollar Hong Kong coin.
2. Brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste in the morning and at night.
3. Thoroughly clean every tooth surface, including the outer surfaces, inner surfaces and chewing surfaces.
4. The toothbrush should be placed with the tips of the bristles tilted at an angle towards the gum margin. Gently move the toothbrush in small scrubbing motions, working on two to three teeth at one time.

A. Brush the outer surfaces of the lower teeth



B. Then brush the inner surfaces of the lower teeth



C. When brushing the inner surfaces of the front teeth, hold the toothbrush upright using gentle motion brushing from the gingival margin towards the crowns of the teeth



D. Then brush the chewing surfaces of the teeth with the toothbrush moving backward and forward



Finally, brush the outer surfaces, inner surfaces and the chewing surfaces of the upper teeth in the same way as the lower one.

Flossing

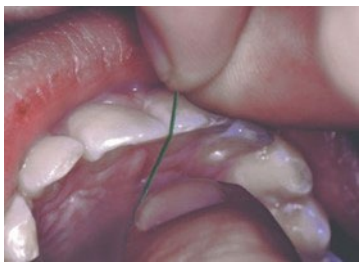
1. Firstly, take a piece of approximately 20 - 25cm dental floss and tie it into a loop.



2. Use your thumbs and forefingers to manipulate a 2cm interval of the floss.



3. Use a sawing in-and-out motion, gently slide the floss into the interdental space of two neighbouring teeth.



4. Wrap around one tooth making a "C" shape and gently pull down to the deepest part of the gum pocket, and then slide it up and down against the tooth. Then wrap around the adjacent tooth and repeat the up and down motions. Clean all the other adjacent tooth surfaces in the same way.




Use of interdental brush

In the case of gum recession due to gum disease, the space between the roots of the neighbouring teeth is widened, an interdental brush may be used instead of dental floss.

Gently insert the interdental brush into the gap between the teeth, placing the brush as close to the gum margin as possible, move the brush back and forth to clean the adjacent tooth surfaces.



If you have a fixed dental bridge, you need to use superfloss

Use the spongy segment of the superfloss to clean the surfaces under the bridge.

You may remove the dental plaque on the adjacent tooth surfaces with the regular floss segment of the superfloss.




If you wear a removable denture, you need to remove it daily for cleaning

Dental plaque adheres to the surfaces of a denture. In order to maintain your oral health and the hygiene of your denture, you need to remove your denture for cleaning before bed every night.

1. First, fill the washing basin with some water to prevent accidental dropping and breakage of the denture.
2. Apply some detergent onto a toothbrush and clean every surface of the denture. Then rinse the denture thoroughly.



3. Soak the denture in a cup of water overnight.

Regular dental checkup

- Diabetic patients need to inform the dentist about any changes of their diabetic condition and the medicine they take.
- Gum disease in a diabetic patient can deteriorate rapidly and progress to a serious stage easily. Thus, they should follow their dentist's advice and may need to receive more frequent dental checkups and treatment.
- A removable denture can become ill-fitting as a result of gum recession and loosening of the teeth due to gum disease. Patients should have regular dental checkup and let the dentist adjust their dentures if necessary.

Receive dental treatment

If a patient's blood sugar level is not well controlled, non-urgent dental surgery should be postponed.

If tooth extraction or dental treatment is necessary, patients should eat something beforehand and have their blood sugar level tested. It helps to prevent hypoglycemia because patients may not be able to have food after dental treatment.

Do not smoke

Studies have shown that the chance of getting gum disease is 5 times higher or more for smokers than that of non-smokers. Therefore, patients with diabetes should not smoke.

If you are unaware that you have diabetes, how can you prevent gum disease?

Some diabetic patients do not realize that they have diabetes. When they develop gum disease and fail to control blood sugar level promptly, the gum disease becomes difficult to heal, causing significant damage to their oral health.

Besides, some patients with diabetes may not have obvious symptoms at an early stage; the disease is only discovered after complications have arisen. Therefore, if you have had gum disease for a prolonged period and there is no significant improvement despite proper oral care and dental treatment, you are advised to have the blood sugar level checked for diabetes, so that you can receive appropriate treatment as early as possible.