

# Gum disease can raise your blood sugar level

**G**um disease” is an infection by germs in the gums around the teeth. It is one of the most common infections in people around the world. In its more serious form—known as “periodontitis”—the infection is long lasting. The soft gums and bone around the teeth dissolve over time. This can lead to loss of teeth. One-half of the U.S. population 30 years and older has periodontitis, as do 60 percent of 60-year-olds.<sup>1</sup>

## PERIODONTITIS RAISES BLOOD SUGAR AND MAY LEAD TO TYPE 2 DIABETES

People with diabetes, especially uncontrolled diabetes, have more gum disease than those without diabetes. We have known that for a long time. Now, scientists are finding that gum disease may raise blood sugar levels in people with and without diabetes.

At a recent meeting of top experts in dental and diabetes research from around the world, scientists looked closely at the latest research into how gum disease could affect diabetes. They found that, compared with those with healthy gums, people with severe gum disease

- have higher long-term blood sugar levels ( $A_{1c}$ );
- might be at a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes;
- may be at a higher risk of developing pregnancy (gestational) diabetes;
- have a harder time controlling their type 2 diabetes;
- are at a higher risk of experiencing harm to eyes and kidneys, as well as a heart attack and stroke if they have diabetes.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW DOES GUM DISEASE MAKE BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS GO UP?

Scientists think that some of the germs in infected gums leak into the bloodstream after normal activities such as chewing or toothbrushing. This starts a reaction from your body’s defense system, which, in turn, produces some powerful molecules that have harmful effects all over

your body. An example is raising your blood sugar level.

## CAN GUM DISEASE TREATMENT HELP CONTROL YOUR DIABETES?

Yes, the good news is that in people with type 2 diabetes, treatment of severe disease (for instance, deep cleaning) can lead to a drop in blood sugar levels. The benefit is about the same as you might find if you added another drug to your usual diabetes medicine.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Keep your gums as healthy as possible, whether or not you have diabetes.

- Brush your teeth gently twice a day with a soft-bristled brush and a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth with floss or another interdental cleaner daily.
- Visit your dentist regularly for checkups and cleanings.
- Make sure you have your gums checked; the dentist or dental hygienist should measure the space between the teeth and the gums to look for gum disease.

If you have type 2 diabetes, keeping your gums healthy could help you control your disease. It also may help lower your risk of experiencing problems, such as blindness and kidney disease, because of your diabetes.

The latest research on links between gum disease and diabetes shows how important it is to have healthy gums.

A healthy mouth is an important part of good overall health. ■

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