

Diabetes linked to Gum Disease?

By Ellen Zanichelli, RDH, BS

The American Diabetes Association reports that 20.8 million Americans currently have diabetes. About one third of those with the disease are unaware that they have it, and of those who have been diagnosed, only slightly more than half have it under control.

Diabetes is a disease where the body doesn't produce or properly use insulin, a hormone made in the pancreas. Insulin unlocks cells so that sugars derived from carbohydrates and other food can enter the cell. Sugar is the basic energy for cells and therefore provides us energy. There are two types of diabetes, type 1 and type 2. In type 1 the pancreas no longer makes insulin so sugar is unable to enter the cells and builds up in the bloodstream. In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or the hormone does not function properly, a condition called insulin resistance. Again in this situation the sugar is not able to enter the cell and builds up in the bloodstream. In both conditions, cells are starved for energy. As time goes on, diabetes can damage vision, cause kidney failure, nerve damage, heart disease and poor wound healing. Research indicates that diabetic patients also have a higher risk of gum disease or periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is an inflammatory process that causes our gums to bleed and destroys the bone and soft tissues that support our teeth. New research indicates that periodontal disease may also affect a type 2 diabetic patient's ability to control his or her blood sugar levels. This may then cause the other destructive health complications associated to diabetes. Also because of the slower wound healing in diabetics, diabetes can often worsen oral health which in turn deteriorates blood sugar control. It is important to know that periodontal treatment can reduce inflammation of the tissues around the teeth, thereby improving blood sugar control in many patients with diabetes.

It is important that diabetic patients are seen by their dental health care providers to stop the viscous cycle before it begins. Good oral hygiene practices of brushing and flossing, getting regular periodontal exams by your dental hygienist or dentist and treating periodontal disease early can aid in the control of diabetes.

Ellen Zanichelli RDH, BS is the owner of La Plaza Dental Hygiene

Please call or come by the office with questions or just to make an appointment.

Ellen has been a practicing dental hygiene in Evergreen Community for a couple of decades.

Located at 3092 Evergreen Pkwy, Suite 202

Call 303-674-1373 or E-mail ellen@laplazadentalhygiene.com