



DIABETES AND ORAL HEALTH

Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects the body's ability to process glucose (sugar) in the blood. Persistent elevated blood glucose levels (hyperglycemia) can damage your gums, eyes, nerves, blood vessels, kidneys, heart, and other parts of your body. There is no cure for diabetes, but consistent medical and dental care and healthy lifestyle habits help manage it. Unmanaged diabetes can lead to devastating complications, including blindness, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, and amputations of toes, feet, or legs.

In 2019, more than 98,7000 Delaware adults had been diagnosed with diabetes, according to the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Division of Public Health (DPH). One-quarter of all Delaware adults have or are at elevated risk for diabetes.

There are three types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes** – In individuals with Type 1 diabetes, the pancreas does not make any insulin, a hormone that regulates glucose levels. Children, teens, and young adults are most often diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented. It is treated with daily intake of insulin.
- **Type 2 diabetes** – In individuals with Type 2 diabetes, the pancreas does not make enough insulin. Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all diabetes cases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Type 2 diabetes typically develops in individuals over 45 but can occur in teens and youth. Type 2 diabetes can be prevented in some people who make small to moderate improvements in their health behaviors. It is treated with portion control of food, daily activity, oral medications (pills), and insulin.
- **Gestational diabetes** – Gestational diabetes occurs in some women during pregnancy and affects both the mother and unborn baby. Women with gestational diabetes should have their glucose levels tested eight to 12 weeks after giving birth.

Prediabetes

Another recognized medical condition is prediabetes (impaired glucose tolerance). Individuals with prediabetes have higher than normal blood glucose levels but are not diagnosed with diabetes. When they adopt healthier lifestyle behaviors, they can drastically reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

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Symptoms of Untreated Diabetes

- Excessive thirst
- Frequent urination
- Weight loss
- Unexplained fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Loss of consciousness if your blood sugar falls too low
- Dry mouth (Dry mouth is also caused by certain medications.)
- Inflamed gums that bleed often (gum disease)
- A yeast infection in the mouth called oral thrush (candidiasis)
- Impaired taste
- Wounds, including mouth sores, that are slow to heal
- Frequent mouth infections
- In children, teeth may erupt at an age earlier than is typical.

Your dentist can help you fight and manage diabetes

Regular dental visits are important because your dentist can spot clues of diabetes in people who may not know that they have it. For example, the dentist can diagnose dry mouth and infections such as oral thrush (candidiasis), which looks like a white layer coating your tongue and the insides of your cheeks. The dentist will encourage patients with diabetes symptoms to visit their primary care provider and be tested for it.

Periodontal disease (gum disease) is more common among those with diabetes due to poor blood sugar control and less saliva. Early gum disease can be reversed with proper brushing, flossing, and diet. Serious periodontal disease can destroy your gums, the tissues holding your teeth, and your bones. Having dental cleanings can help. Those with diabetes should follow medical and dental advice, including these tips:

- Control glucose levels to minimize bacterial or fungal infections in the mouth.
- Take medications as directed.
- Adopt a healthier diet and be physically active.
- Avoid smoking.
- Fight dry mouth and cavities. Drink plenty of water, chew sugarless gum, and eat healthy, crunchy foods to get saliva flowing.
- Clean dentures daily.
- Brush twice a day with a soft brush and clean between your teeth daily with floss or floss picks.
- Visit your dentist for regular checkups, especially if an area of the mouth is not healing as it should.

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For more information

For more information about oral and dental health, contact DPH's Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

For more information about diabetes, contact DPH's Diabetes and Heart Disease Prevention and Control Program at 302-744-1040 and <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/diabetes.html>.

To locate dental providers, including pediatric dentists, read the 2021 Dental Resource Guide with information for low-cost dental care <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/files/dentalresourceguide.pdf>

Resources

1. Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Diabetes and Heart Disease Prevention and Control Program and Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance; Delaware Department of Human Resources, Delaware Statewide Benefits Office. The Impact of Diabetes in Delaware 2021. Retrieved July 02, 2021 from: <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/files/diabetesburdenreport2021.pdf>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About Pre-diabetes and Type 2 Diabetes. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/about-prediabetes.html>
3. Delaware Diabetes Coalition. 2020. Resource Guide for Persons with Diabetes, 12th edition, 2020. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from <https://www.dediabetescoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-Resource-Guide.pdf>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Diabetes Prevention Program. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/index.html>
5. American Dental Association. 2020. *Diabetes*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes>
6. American Dental Association. 2020. *Diabetes*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/diabetes-slideshow>

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