

Caring for Your Teeth and Gums

When you have diabetes, it's important to keep your mouth healthy. High blood sugar makes it harder to fight infections, including in your mouth. High blood sugar can weaken your gums, making it easier for them to get infected and causing loose teeth. High blood sugar also can make it harder for your spit (saliva) to remove plaque, a sticky film that gets on your teeth and can cause cavities. But following a few simple steps – and keeping your blood sugar under control – can help you have your healthiest smile.

How to Keep Your Mouth Healthy



Visit your dentist every 6 months.

- This is very important as you get older. People over 40 have a high risk of gum disease.



Brush at least twice a day.

- Use a soft bristle brush and toothpaste with fluoride.
- Hold the brush at an angle where your teeth meet your gums.
- Gently brush back and forth on the front and back of your teeth. Be sure to brush the places on your teeth where you chew food.
- To clean the back of your front teeth, gently brush up and down instead of back and forth.
- Brush your tongue lightly to remove germs and freshen your breath.
- Get a new toothbrush at least every 3 months.



Floss your teeth once a day.

- Break off about 18 inches of dental floss. Wind it around your middle fingers until you have an inch or two of floss between your fingers.
- Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and forefingers.
- Gently slide the floss between your teeth. Never snap the floss into the gums.
- When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C shape against one tooth. Gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth.
- Hold the floss tightly against the tooth and gently slide it up and down the side of the tooth.
- Do this again on your other teeth. Use a clean section of floss for each tooth.
- Remember to floss both sides of the teeth farthest back in your mouth.
- Talk to your dentist if you have trouble using dental floss. Your dentist can show you what to do or give you a different way to floss.



Contact Your Dentist If:

- Your gums start to bleed when you brush. This could be a sign of infection.
- Your teeth have moved or your dentures don't fit anymore.
- Your tongue is sore or tender or it has red spots.
- You have white patches on your gums. This could mean you have an infection called thrush.
- Your mouth, gums, or teeth feel different, or you see changes in their color.
- You often have bad breath. This could mean you have a gum infection or a cavity.

If you need surgery on your gums, **be sure to tell your dentist you have diabetes.** That way, your dentist will understand that it might take longer for you to heal and that you might need extra protection against infections.