

FACT SHEET:

Looking after your dental health

Looking after your dental health is very important when you have diabetes. People with diabetes are more likely to develop dental problems. You can reduce your risk by managing your diabetes and having regular dental checks and timely treatment. Dental problems cause less damage when detected and treated early.

Blood glucose levels above the target range increase the risk of dental problems such as tooth decay, and gum infections or disease.

When your blood glucose levels are above target, you may have a dry mouth and more glucose in your saliva. This can lead to the build-up of plaque on your teeth – a sticky film consisting mostly of bacteria. The bacteria produce acids which can damage the surface of the tooth. This leads to tooth decay and gum disease. You can help protect your teeth and gums with regular brushing and flossing.

Tooth decay

Tooth decay occurs when acids in the mouth damage the outer surface of your teeth. This can lead to a hole or cavity in the tooth. In the early stages of tooth decay, you may not have any signs or symptoms.

Signs or symptoms of tooth decay are:

- tooth ache
- sensitive teeth
- bad breath and an unpleasant taste in your mouth
- spots appearing on your teeth.

Gum disease

Gum disease affects most people at some time during their life. Even if you wear dentures, you can experience gum disease and other dental problems. Plaque can also irritate the gums, make them red and swollen, and sometimes cause bleeding. This can lead to infections that destroy the bone surrounding and supporting your teeth.

Blood glucose levels above the target range can cause bacteria to grow. This allows infections to develop quickly. It also makes them more difficult to treat. In its early stages gum disease is usually painless, many people do not even know they have it.

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Signs and symptoms of gum disease are:

- bleeding gums when you brush or floss your teeth
- red, swollen or tender gums
- bad breath
- a dry mouth and/or oral thrush, causing white patches on the tongue, cheeks or roof of mouth
- teeth that are loose or moving away from each other
- gums that have pulled away from the tooth, so the tooth's root is showing, or the tooth looks longer
- changes in the way dentures fit.

Make an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible if you notice any signs of tooth decay or gum disease.

Looking after your dental health

There are several things you can do to reduce your risk of dental problems.

Keep blood glucose levels within your target range. Talk to your doctor and diabetes educator about how to achieve this.

Brush and floss your teeth twice daily. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and a soft toothbrush.

See your dentist at least once a year. Tell your dentist you have diabetes and let them know if you have noticed any signs of gum disease.

Do not smoke. If you do, try to quit. Ask for help if you feel you cannot give up smoking on your own. Talk to your doctor or call the Quitline on **137 848**.

Make healthy food and drink choices. Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods, and limit foods and drinks high in added sugars. Choose water as your everyday drink.

Looking after your dentures

Follow the below steps.

- Clean your dentures every day.
- Place a washer or water in the sink to avoid breaking your dentures if you drop them.
- Rinse them thoroughly under water each night. Clean them with a soft denture brush, then soak them in a recommended denture cleaner to help eliminate any remaining food.
- Remove them after each meal, then rinse your mouth with water.
- Brush your gums gently with a soft toothbrush. This stimulates blood circulation.
- Do not clean your dentures with toothpaste, bleaching products, ammonia-based cleaners, abrasives, or very hot water. This can damage them.
- Make sure your dentures fit properly. If your dentures do not fit properly, they might damage your gums and increase your risk of infection.
- See your dentist at least once a year. Your dentist will assess the health of your gums, look for pressure spots, and check the fit of your dentures.





More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to search for the 'Annual cycle of care', 'Diabetes -related complications' and other fact sheets.
- Go to [ndss.com.au/annual-cycle-of-care-podcasts/](https://www.ndss.com.au/annual-cycle-of-care-podcasts/) and listen to Episode 7 Dental health – Seeing a dentist, and other episodes in the Annual Cycle of Care podcast series.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 600** and ask to speak to a diabetes educator.
- Go to [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) to find dentist near you.
- For more information about brushing and flossing your teeth, and dental health, go to the Australian Dental Association at [teeth.org.au](https://www.teeth.org.au).



Top tips

- Have a dental check at least once a year. Your dentist will assess the health of your gums and teeth. If you have dentures, your dentist will look for pressure spots, and check the fit of your dentures.
- Make an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible if you notice any signs of tooth decay or gum disease.
- You can help protect your teeth and gums with regular brushing and flossing.

Notes

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice and if you have any concerns about your health or further questions, you should contact your health professional.