

Diabetes and dental dangers

People who live with diabetes on a daily basis are usually told to eat properly, maintain regular physical activity, and if necessary, take medication.

What many may not know is that these medications that help control healthy insulin levels may lead to unexpected events at the dentist's office. According to a study in the November/December 2007 issue of *General Dentistry*, the AGD's clinical, peer-reviewed journal, diabetic patients especially need to communicate special needs to their dentists. This is due to harmful interactions that could occur because of the materials and medications used at dental appointments.

According to the study, more than 194 million people worldwide have diabetes, and health officials estimate that this figure will double or triple in less than 20 years. "It is imperative that diabetic patients inform their dentist of their needs in order to anticipate medication interactions and physical reactions to treatment," says Lee Shackelford, DDS, FAGD, spokesperson for the AGD.

"The doctor must know if the patient is taking insulin, and has taken their daily dose of insulin, in order to anticipate the length of the appointment."

It does not stop, however, with diabetic patients; providing dentists with as much information as possible about current medications is essential for everyone's oral health.

Open communication is essential

"It is important that your dentist is aware of all of the medications that you are taking, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and herbal drugs as they may interact with agents that your dentist may use for your dental treatment," advises lead author of the study, James Little, DMD, MS.

"Talk with your dentist if you are concerned about how the medications you are taking could affect your oral health," advises Dr. Shackelford. "Open communication is the best way to ensure that your dentist gives you the best treatment possible."

Steps diabetic patients can take to ensure optimal dental care:

- Find a dentist who is aware of the needs of diabetic patients.
- See the dentist on a regular basis and alert him or her of any changes in health status and medications.
- Inform the dentist of any sores, swellings, or areas of redness in the mouth, as well as any painful areas in the mouth.
- Eat a normal meal prior to the dental appointment, take all diabetic medications on schedule, bringing a blood sugar monitoring device to the appointment, and tell the dentist if you feel symptoms associated with low blood sugar.

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