

TRICARE Tips for Managing Diabetes and Your Oral Health

Diabetes is a common condition in the United States. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), more than 38 million American adults currently have diabetes.

“Even though diabetes is common, many people don’t know about its connection to oral health,” said Douglas Elsesser, a program analyst with the Dental Program Section of the TRICARE Health Plan.

“Uncontrolled diabetes can negatively affect your oral health in many ways.”

If you have diabetes, it’s important to keep it under control. Here are some examples of how diabetes can affect your oral health:

- Reduced saliva production. Saliva helps clean bacteria and neutralize acids that cause tooth decay. Having less saliva increases your risk for cavities.
- Rapid bacteria growth. High blood sugar levels allow bacteria in the mouth to multiply quickly. Oral bacteria causes gum disease and other infections.
- Increased plaque buildup. Plaque is a film of bacteria that sticks to teeth. Unchecked diabetes increases plaque buildup. This increases your risk for gum disease.
- Decreased ability to fight infections. People with diabetes are more prone to gingivitis and advanced gum disease. These infections can destroy gum tissue and bone, leading to tooth loss.

Poor oral health also makes diabetes harder to manage. Gum disease causes inflammation, which can spike blood sugar levels, which is a concern for people with diabetes.

To properly care for your oral health, you can adopt these practices:

- Brush your teeth twice a day and floss daily.
- Seek treatment right away if you show any signs of gum disease. Early signs of gum disease include swollen gums, gums that bleed easily, and bad breath that won’t go away.
- Coordinate treatment with your dentist and physician.
- Quit smoking and using tobacco.
- Limit the amount of sugar you eat and drink.
- Chew sugar-free gum to increase saliva flow.

Wondering how TRICARE covers dental care? Dental coverage is separate from TRICARE’s health plan coverage. Your [dental coverage options](#) are based on who you are:

- Active duty service members get their dental care at military dental clinics or through the [Active Duty Dental Program](#).
- Other beneficiary types may be eligible for dental coverage through the [TRICARE Dental Program](#) or the [Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program](#). Enrollment in these programs is voluntary, as noted in the [TRICARE Dental Options Fact Sheet](#).

If you’re enrolled in the TDP, you may be eligible for the TDP Wellness Program. The TDP Wellness Program offers expanded coverage at no additional cost to people with diabetes and certain other health conditions. This coverage includes additional cleanings, fluoride treatments, and certain gum surgery procedures. If you have diabetes, be sure to enroll in the TDP Wellness Program through the TDP contractor, United Concordia. To enroll, go to the [United Concordia TDP website](#) and log in to *My Account*.