



## *Dental Care and Chronic Conditions*

- Respiratory Disease
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Diabetes



Your Plan for Life.™

## Shape Up Your Smile and Avoid Some Complications of Chronic Diseases

*When you take good care of your oral health, you get more than a nice smile. You get the satisfaction of knowing that following a routine of proper brushing and flossing, healthy eating, and regular dentist visits will keep your teeth and gums in good shape for years to come.*

On the other hand, poor oral health can cause tooth decay, cavities, and oral diseases, such as periodontitis (which may lead to tooth loss), and it can affect your appearance and your ability to eat. Poor dental care can also complicate respiratory disease and some types of heart disease. Because of high blood sugar levels, people with diabetes are also more likely to have trouble with teeth and gums.



## Good Oral Health Can Help You Avoid Certain Complications of Chronic Diseases

Proper dental care can help you avoid certain complications, such as the ones described below.

### Respiratory Disease

- Poor oral hygiene and periodontal disease allow more bacteria to grow in the mouth and throat.
- Bacteria can travel into the lower respiratory tract and lungs, causing an infection or making an existing lung condition worse, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- People with COPD, or other respiratory conditions, have weaker lungs—and it's harder for them to get rid of this harmful bacteria.



### Cardiovascular Disease

- The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that people with certain heart conditions take antibiotics before dental treatment to avoid a bacterial infection of the heart or heart valves (endocarditis).
- The AHA says that people who are more likely to develop endocarditis are those who have artificial heart valves, damaged heart valves, a history of endocarditis, congenital heart or heart valve defects, or a condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. If you have heart disease, please ask your physician if you should take antibiotics for dental procedures.
- Always tell your dentist what medicines you take, because some can affect your oral health.

**Note:** *The relationship between periodontal disease and heart disease is currently under active scientific investigation.*

## Diabetes

- Poor oral care can lead to more infections, making it harder to control blood sugar and increasing the need for insulin.
- High blood sugar levels give mouth bacteria more food, increasing the possibility of tooth decay, gingivitis, and periodontal disease.
- Diabetes increases the time it takes for infections to heal, including those in your mouth.
- People with diabetes can have less saliva, causing “dry mouth.” Saliva helps get rid of harmful bacteria, and when there is not enough, it can lead to bacterial decay.
- Dry mouth, when combined with higher levels of blood sugar, increases the chances of yeast infections forming. This can cause thrush, or sore white or red areas in the mouth.

### *Reminders for Visits to Your Dentist or Oral Surgeon*

- Let your dentist know you have diabetes.
- Be sure your glucose level is under control before any dental visit or procedure, because it helps you heal better.
- Plan your dental visit around meals, such as after breakfast.
- If any procedures are planned, talk to your doctor and dentist to see if you should change your medicine, including antibiotics.
- If you have any dental procedures, your mouth may be sore and affect your ability to eat. Be sure to plan for softer foods so you can still eat and keep your blood sugar levels under control.
- Remember that stress from dental procedures can affect your blood sugars. Talk about this ahead of time with your doctor.



## *Caring for Your Teeth*

To avoid these complications of chronic diseases, it just makes sense to do everything you can to ensure the health of your teeth and gums. That starts with careful brushing and flossing, limiting snacks between meals, and scheduling regular appointments with your dentist.

### **Brush Up on Your Technique**

A good toothbrush is your first line of defense. Choose one with soft bristles, and brush at least twice a day. Dentists recommend brushing with the bristles at a 45-degree angle to your teeth. Be sure to use gentle strokes to avoid irritating your gums and wearing away tooth enamel.

Select a brand of toothpaste that is non-abrasive. Use just enough to cover the surface of the toothbrush. Brush both the inner and outer surfaces of your teeth, and don't forget the chewing parts of the molars. You can even brush your tongue to help control bad breath. Also, remember to replace your toothbrush every three months.

### **Be the Boss of Floss**

Flossing once a day is helpful for maintaining good oral hygiene. Take about 18 inches of floss and wrap it around one finger on each hand. Using a light touch, ease the floss between your teeth, taking care not to snap it. Continue to curve the floss around the tooth, and gently rub between the tooth and gum. Repeat this process for all your teeth, including the back of the last teeth.

## Watch What You Eat

A sensible, healthy diet is good for your whole body, including your teeth. Try to limit your intake of sugar, which is a major cause of tooth decay and cavities.

Another contributing source of cavities is food that sticks to your teeth. Some examples are chewy candy, dried fruit, and bananas. These foods tend to coat the teeth and stay on longer. If you eat these kinds of food, get in the habit of brushing or flossing afterwards. Try to limit your snacks, but if you do eat between meals, have food that washes away easily, such as apples or carrots.

## Visit Your Dentist Twice Each Year

Last—but not least—it is recommended that you see your dentist twice a year. There simply is no better way to keep minor problems from becoming major ones than to schedule regular checkups with your dentist.

During your visit, you will get a professional cleaning to remove plaque buildup. Your dentist may also give you a thorough dental examination and take X-rays.

## Call Your Dentist Immediately if You Have These Symptoms

Please be sure to notify your dentist immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Sores, bleeding, redness, or swelling in your mouth
- Pain when chewing, or bad odors or taste
- Holes or dark spots in your teeth or loose teeth
- Pain in your teeth when you eat something cold, hot, or sweet



*Learn more about dental health and chronic disease, take action, and stay on track by visiting the Web sites below. Of course, if you ever have any questions, be sure to speak with your dentist or healthcare provider.*

**[www.BCBSRI.com](http://www.BCBSRI.com)**

**[www.lungusa.com](http://www.lungusa.com)**

**[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)**

**[www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov)**

**[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)**

## Brighten Your Smile with Blue Cross Dental

Blue Cross Dental is the perfect partner to ensure your oral health. Our group dental plans are designed to fit your needs. We have a national Coast-to-Coast network featuring more than 75,000 dentist locations. Speak to your employer today, and see how Blue Cross Dental gives you more reasons to smile, or go to [BCBSRI.com](http://BCBSRI.com) for more information.



Your Plan for Life.™

[www.BCBSRI.com](http://www.BCBSRI.com)

444 Westminister Street • Providence, RI 02903-3279

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

06/07

MM-3869 • 0239BR