

## Oral Wellness Newsletter

*Hello everyone! Here's our November newsletter. The content is easy to share - just use the "forward this email" button. Or highlight the text you want, then copy and paste it wherever you like. It's that simple.*

*November is Diabetes Awareness Month, and the 14th is World Diabetes Day—shedding light on this chronic condition that affects so many. Nearly 30 million Americans have diabetes, but did you know that people with poorly controlled diabetes are more likely to develop oral health complications, such as gum disease? In turn, these complications can contribute to disease progression—so the connection between diabetes and oral health is real.*

### Could your dentist save your life?

**For Jeff Moyers, the answer was yes.**

The day Jeff Moyers walked into his dentist's office, he never expected anything other than a routine cleaning and check-up—and maybe a nudge to visit more often, since he hadn't been there in a few years. Instead, he got an urgent wake-up call.

During his cleaning, the hygienist casually asked, "How long have you had diabetes?" Shocked, Jeff replied, "I don't!" But his red swollen gums, dry mouth and excessive plaque told a different story. After examining Jeff, the dentist agreed that he exhibited the telltale signs of diabetes and urged him to schedule an appointment with his doctor.



It's not uncommon for a hygienist or dentist to be the first ones to detect chronic conditions such as diabetes, as oral examinations can reveal signs and symptoms of more than 90% of systemic diseases.\*

Although the idea of having diabetes initially hit Jeff "over the head like a hammer," it didn't sound out of the question. He'd been tired and sluggish, gaining weight and having trouble seeing. Diabetes also runs in his family, and he remembered his parents always discouraging his relentless sweet tooth.

So Jeff scheduled an appointment with his doctor, who ordered an A1C evaluation, a simple blood test that shows average blood glucose (sugar) level. His worst fears were confirmed – not only did he have Type 2 diabetes—his off-the-charts blood sugar level, high blood pressure and high cholesterol level put him at risk of having a massive heart attack within months. “This was a serious wake-up call, and I immediately took action to improve my health,” said Jeff.

Armed with a prescription for a new medication and a healthier lifestyle, Jeff began to make changes. In addition to eating healthier and exercising more often, he practices better oral hygiene at home, using an electric toothbrush and water flosser, and gets his teeth cleaned more often. “I wanted to move in the right direction, so I do what I can to keep my health in check,” he said. After a few years walking a healthier path, Jeff’s diabetes is under control.

As a Sales Executive for United Concordia Dental, Jeff now knows all about the importance of dental checkups and cleanings. He often tells his story to others to stress the importance of oral health. “Sometimes people look a little bored, but when I tell them about what happened to me, they perk up and start paying attention.”

If I can help people think about their health in a different way, my story serves a greater purpose,” he said. “My dentist basically saved my life.”

Visit [UnitedConcordia.com](http://UnitedConcordia.com) to learn more about [oral health and diabetes](#).

\*vans CA, Kleinman DV, Maas WR, et al. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General (Executive Summary). US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health; 2000. Accessed October 1, 2019.

Jeff Moyers has been a Sales Executive for United Concordia since 2018 and has more than 25 years of industry experience, working on both the carrier and broker sides of the business. He currently resides in a suburb of Minneapolis, MN with his wife and son. In his spare time, Jeff enjoys the outdoors and coaching and watching his son play baseball. He also enjoys woodworking and collecting vinyl records.



## Diabetes and oral health go hand in hand

While most people with diabetes know about the condition’s associated risks, such as stroke, eye disease, kidney disease and foot issues, they may be less informed about the important connection between diabetes and oral health. These patients work with many different kinds of health care providers as part of their diabetes care team, and the dentist should be an integral part of this team.

**People who are diabetic may have:**

- **Reduced saliva production:** Saliva is needed to clean bacteria from teeth and neutralize harmful acids in the mouth, which can cause tooth decay.
- **Rapid bacteria growth:** High blood glucose (sugar) increases glucose in saliva, and bad bacteria in the mouth feeds off sugar.<sup>[1]</sup>
- **Increased plaque development:** When bacteria combines with food particles and other substances, it can form the soft, sticky stuff on your teeth, called plaque, which is one of the main causes of gum disease.<sup>[2]</sup>
- **Decreased ability to fight and resist infection:** With early gum disease (gingivitis), the gums may be red, swollen or bleeding. If it progresses to more severe gum disease, or periodontitis, this can destroy the tissues and bone that hold the teeth in place, eventually causing tooth loss.<sup>[3]</sup> Periodontitis may impact the body's ability to control blood glucose (sugar) levels, thus making diabetes more difficult to control.<sup>[1]</sup>

## The catch-22

Inflammation, anywhere in the body, can cause blood sugar levels to rise in people with diabetes, and high sugar levels create inflammation. So diabetics with existing gum disease, which is inflammatory in nature, may find that their blood sugar becomes harder to control, and these high sugar levels can cause their gum disease to progress more rapidly. A seemingly impossibly cycle to break, there are management solutions.

## Manage diabetes and oral health--together

It's especially important for those with diabetes, or signs of the condition, to keep their mouth, teeth and gums as healthy as possible.<sup>[1]</sup> Here are some tips that will keep your mouth free of disease and help control your blood-sugar level:

- Practice optimal oral hygiene, brushing twice and flossing once daily.
- Visit your dentist regularly for cleanings and routine check-ups.
- Have an annual comprehensive periodontal examination, so if gum disease is detected in the early stages, it can be reversed and/or treated with either nonsurgical treatment, like scaling and root planing, or more advanced treatments if needed.\*
- Keep your dentist informed of your glucose levels. Your dentist and your physician may need to collaborate to provide you the best overall care.
- Control blood glucose levels as best as possible.
- Avoid sweets, which aren't good for oral health or diabetes. Keep in mind that even sugar-free varieties may be high in acid, which also can harm teeth and gums.
- Chew sugar-free gum or lozenges to stimulate saliva or use a saliva substitute.

\*If you have diabetes and your dental plan offers our [Smile for Health-Wellness®](#) program, you can get more coverage for periodontal services you may need.

*Sources:*

1 Diabetes, Gum Disease, and Other Dental Problems; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, September 2014

2 Diabetes and dental care: Guide to a healthy mouth; Mayo Clinic, September 2015

3 Prevent Diabetes Problems, Keep Your Teeth And Gums Healthy; Colgate Oral Care Center, November 2010

4 Oral Health and Hygiene; American Diabetes Association, September 2012



## **Quit vaping cold turkey**

Using e-cigarettes, or vaping, has become a serious issue for kids, teens and adults alike. E-cigarettes are electronic devices that heat the liquid that's inside, turning it into an aerosol mist that you inhale.

Young people are drawn to vaping because the aerosol comes in tempting "flavors" like strawberry, mango and blue raspberry. Kids also mistakenly tend to think vaping is safer than smoking. In fact, research shows that young people who use vaping devices are more likely to smoke in the future.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the aerosol users inhale is not just harmless water vapor. It can contain nicotine, cancer-causing chemicals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Sadly, the CDC reports that over 2,807 people have died or been hospitalized due to lung injuries caused by vaping.

If you suspect your teen is into vaping, have a talk about the dangers. Then get ready to help them quit, which can be as tough as quitting smoking. Here are some resources that can help guide your journey to a nicotine-free teen.

[Read the health risks of vaping](#)

[How to quit vaping for teens](#)



## Daily oral care for people with Alzheimer's

Does your loved one ask the same questions over and over? Forget names, appointments or where the car keys are? Memory loss is one of the first symptoms of dementia, and Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.

This forgetfulness may spill over into oral hygiene, too. Brushing and flossing each day may slip your loved one's mind. He or she might even draw a blank on how to hold a toothbrush or squeeze out toothpaste.

If you notice a decline in oral care, it may be time to step in. Poor oral care can lead to dental disease, which could be difficult to treat and require extensive procedures. These tips from the Alzheimer's Association can guide you how to help:

### **Provide short, simple instructions**

Saying "Brush your teeth" may be too vague. Be specific and say, "Hold your toothbrush. Put paste on the brush. Now brush your teeth."

### **Use a "watch me" technique**

Hold a toothbrush and demonstrate how to brush. Or put your hand over the person's hand and gently guide the brush.

### **Keep the teeth and mouth clean**

Make sure to brush the teeth, gums, tongue and roof of the mouth twice a day.

### **Floss daily**

If using dental floss is too distressing, try a "proxabrush" to get in the small gaps between teeth. It's a tiny, soft-bristled brush that looks like a mini pipe cleaner.

### **Clean dentures regularly**

Rinse them with plain water after meals, brush them daily and soak them in a denture cleanser at night. Wipe the gums with a soft toothbrush or moist gauze.

### **Schedule dental visits**

Keeping up with preventive exams and cleanings helps to avoid cavities, gum disease and other issues down the line.

## [Learn the top 3 oral problems for seniors](#)



### **Alternatives to traditional flossing**

If you hate to floss, we have some really great news about alternatives to traditional flossing! The ADA recommends flossing once a day to maintain optimal oral health, as it removes the sticky film that contains bacteria, also known as plaque, in all the areas between your teeth that your toothbrush just cannot reach. And reaching those places is very important.

So, what are some of the alternatives to string flossing?

#### **Proxy brush**

Sometimes referred to as an interdental or interproximal brush, a proxy brush has a small, cone-shaped brush with a plastic handle. You just insert the brush in the spaces between your teeth, moving gently from tooth to tooth. These brushes are fairly flexible, but if it feels too tight, do not force it. They are available in various sizes, so just get a smaller brush. This method is great at removing plaque and is a great alternative for people that have difficulty holding traditional floss.

#### **Dental floss pick**

A dental floss pick is a plastic tool with a U-shape tip that holds a piece of floss on one end and a toothpick on the other end. They can help you access those hard-to-reach places, like your back teeth. For spaces that catch food more easily, you can use the toothpick end. And you don't always have to floss in front of a sink—dental floss picks travel well in your car or purse, making flossing more convenient than ever. You can even keep one in your end table to use while you watch television!

Hold a toothbrush and demonstrate how to brush. Or put your hand over the person's hand and gently guide the brush.

#### **Water flosser**

Water flossers shoot a thin stream of slightly pressurized water between the spaces of your teeth to remove food particles and plaque. They are easy to use, especially for people that have braces or dental work, like bridges, that require a good cleaning underneath. They're also a great alternative for people with arthritis or dexterity issues that make traditional flossing a little harder.

## Air flosser

Air flossing is a newer and effective method that uses a rapid burst of air in conjunction with water droplets or mouthwash to disrupt plaque and build up.

The most important thing is finding the flossing method that works best for you. Consistency with flossing is the key, and you might find that trying something new helps you maintain the habit!

United Concordia has partnered with Philips Sonicare to offer you 20% savings on select Sonicare electric toothbrushes and air flossers for adults and kids. Shop for one now at [Philips.com/UnitedConcordia](https://philips.com/UnitedConcordia). Just use the discount code shown on the page during checkout.



## Spice up your Thanksgiving leftovers

Sure, the classics like turkey tetrazzini, turkey Devonshire and turkey pot pie are scrumptious. But remember, all that ooey-gooey goodness can do a number on your waistline. Why not try this skinny Southwestern spin on Asian lettuce wraps?

Lean shredded turkey breast gets dressed in a sweet-spicy-smoky sauce, then dolloped into Bibb lettuce cups with nutritious brown rice. Tip: If you're packing them for lunch, keep the lettuce separate until you're ready to eat to prevent soggy leaves.

### Spicy Turkey Lettuce Wraps

Serves 10

#### [Get the recipe](#)

#### Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp. safflower oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup water
- 3 tbsp. cranberry sauce
- 1 small chipotle chili (canned in adobo sauce), chopped
- 1 tsp. adobo sauce
- 2 cups leftover turkey breast, shredded

1 cup cooked brown rice  
10 Bibb lettuce leaves  
3 radishes, julienned  
1/3 cup cilantro leaves  
1/2 cup tomatillo salsa

**Directions:**

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 tbsp. oil to pan; swirl to coat. Add onions and cook 4 minutes or until soft. Add garlic; cook 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add 1/2 cup water, cranberry sauce, adobo sauce and chipotle chili. Stir in turkey; cook 2 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Remove from heat and set aside.

Divide rice and turkey mixture evenly among lettuce leaves. Top evenly with radishes and cilantro. Serve wraps with tomatillo salsa.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving**

90 calories | 1.9g fat | 9g protein | 9g carbohydrates | 1g fiber | 21mg cholesterol | 1mg iron | 96mg sodium | 18mg calcium

[Recipe courtesy of Cooking Light, November 2014](#)