

## Oral Health Impacts Overall Wellness

### *Example: Gum Disease and Diabetes*

Nearly 21 million Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes. It's no wonder that this disease has been termed our country's biggest epidemic. Of even greater concern is that nearly three times that number—an estimated 57 million people in the United States—have a condition called pre-diabetes, and a significant proportion of these people will develop Type 2 diabetes within 10 years.

But regular visits to the dentist's office can help these potential diabetics get an early warning that they should be on the alert.

"We've long known that people with diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease," says Shannon Mills, DDS, Vice President of Professional Relations and Science at Northeast Delta Dental. "But recent studies have revealed that periodontal disease can actually influence pre-diabetes and contribute to the progression of diabetes."

"This connection to diabetes is just one example of the relationship between an individual's oral health and his or her overall wellness," says Dr. Mills. "While the research affirms the importance of taking good care of your teeth and gums, it also underscores the role that oral health care providers can have in early detection of serious systemic disease."

Mills points out that there are numerous reasons to keep regular checkups on your calendar, even if you take good care of your teeth.

- Dental professionals can use today's dental exams to screen for oral cancers and other health issues that can be difficult to spot on your own. More than 120 diseases can cause specific signs and



symptoms in and around the mouth and jaw. Dental professionals performing checkups can spot symptoms that indicate serious problems elsewhere in the body that need attention.

- Checkups allow your dentist to keep up with changes to your health status. Upon learning of medical conditions you've developed or treatments you're receiving, your dentist can recommend strategies to help you proactively counter the negative effects the conditions and treatments would otherwise have on your oral health.
- Preventive checkups provide dentists with opportunities to identify and intervene early in dental disease. This can reduce any pain and the financial costs associated with more severe forms of dental diseases. If caught early, periodontal disease is easier to manage and, in some cases, reverse.

"Dental health professionals can suggest the frequency that's most appropriate for each patient," Dr. Mills said. "Some people don't need to be seen twice each year, while some need to be seen more often. Consult with your dentist to determine the number of yearly visits that is right for you."

**Northeast Delta Dental**

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