

Screening for Diabetes at the Dentist's Office



Your dentist is part of the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network, a group of dental practices that treat patients and also do dental research. For more information go to www.nationaldentalpbrn.org.

A lot of people who have type 2 diabetes, a disease in which your blood sugar (glucose) levels are too high, don't know it. Having high blood sugar is bad for your health, including the health of your teeth and gums. It can increase your risk of getting infections and even slow down how quickly you heal after dental surgery. **So should dentists start testing their patients' glucose levels?**

To find out, dentists in the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network studied the effects of offering a quick blood sugar test to their at-risk patients—those with diabetes or pre-diabetes or with risk factors for diabetes, like being overweight or having high cholesterol or blood pressure. Unlike more precise blood sugar tests, the patients didn't have to fast before the test.



Testing patients' blood sugar levels could have many benefits

- The study showed that both patients and their dentists thought that testing glucose levels was a good idea and easy to do.
- Your test results could help your dentist give you the best possible care. For example, if your glucose levels are high, your dentist may recommend delaying dental surgery until your levels are stable.
- The test results could lead to a referral for needed follow-up care.
- Most patients said they'd more likely recommend their dentist to others if they did blood sugar testing.
- Getting tested at the dental office could help more people control their blood sugar levels.
- The test can be done on an as-needed basis—not everyone needs it.



Many dental patients have high glucose levels

Almost one-third of the patients in the study had glucose levels outside the normal range—and some were dangerously high or dangerously low. Patients with low levels were given glucose to raise their levels quickly. Very low levels can be deadly. All patients were given their test results and, if needed, a referral letter to their physician for follow-up care.



Testing dental patients' glucose levels takes training, but little time

The dentists and hygienists participating in the study underwent training in how to test blood sugar. They then asked their patients who qualified if they'd like to be in the study (almost everyone said yes). The blood sugar test was simple: they took a drop of blood from the patient's fingertip and put it in a glucometer, a small device that measures blood sugar levels in just a couple of seconds.



You can prevent or delay diabetes by:

- Losing weight if you're overweight
- Getting exercise
- Making healthy food choices