

POWERED BY EyeMed

Connecting the dots

How routine dental and vision exams can support earlier diabetes intervention

INTRODUCTION

Diabetes remains one of the most costly and complex chronic conditions in the United States

Diabetes affects more than **38 million** Americans[1]

Its impact extends far beyond blood sugar levels, influencing nearly every system in the body – including the eyes and the mouth. Yet despite its prevalence, diabetes often goes undiagnosed until complications emerge.

Dental and vision providers are uniquely positioned to recognize signs that may be associated with diabetes risk, diabetes-related complications or poor glycemic control, and to encourage medical follow-up when concerns arise. As employers and consumers place greater emphasis on preventive care, dental and vision benefits represent valuable opportunities to improve health awareness and help individuals connect with the care they may need.

[1] "Fast Facts: Health and Economic Costs of Chronic Conditions"; CDC.gov; August 2025.



"The mouth can be a gateway to understanding what may be happening systemically. For people living with or at risk for diabetes, routine dental care and comprehensive vision exams can create important opportunities to raise awareness, encourage connection to care, and support overall health."

JEFF WALAWENDER, DDS
VP of Clinical Strategy, Northeast Delta Dental



Oral and ocular signs of diabetes

Diabetes can affect oral and ocular health in ways that may be clinically observable before patients connect those changes to blood sugar. High blood sugar contributes to inflammation, vascular damage and impaired healing which are all factors that manifest clearly in the mouth and eyes.

DIABETES AND ORAL HEALTH

A two-way connection

People with diabetes are significantly more likely to experience:

- Periodontitis (gum disease)
- Oral infections
- Dry mouth
- Delayed healing

The relationship between diabetes and periodontal disease is bidirectional. Poor glycemic control increases the risk and severity of periodontal disease, while chronic periodontal inflammation can contribute to insulin resistance and make blood sugar management more difficult. Current research continues to support the role of oral health as an important component of diabetes management.

People with periodontitis have an approximately 25% higher risk of developing diabetes, while individuals with diabetes are similarly more likely to develop periodontitis, underscoring the close relationship between oral health and metabolic health.[2]

[2] "Periodontal Disease and Glycemic Control in Diabetes"; Nature Index; February 2025.

DIABETES AND VISION HEALTH

Detecting more than eye disease

Diabetes is the leading cause of severe visual impairment in working-age adults[3]. Diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema, cataracts and glaucoma may develop with few noticeable symptoms in their early stages, making regular eye care especially important.

"The eye examination in the vision benefit is exceptionally valuable and rapidly emerging non-invasive biomarker source. With the retina and optic nerve sharing an origin with the central nervous system, the view of the inner eye during the exam provides a direct view of blood vessels as well as the ability to detect early neurological changes. New Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs using retinal photographs and 3D scans of the retina are adding to the diagnostic tools for eye doctors to identify early cardiovascular and neurological risks even prior to patient symptoms."

JOHN LAHR, OD, FAAO | Sr. Medical Director, EyeMed

[3] "Promoting Eye Health"; CDC.gov; May 2024.
[4] "20 Surprising Health Problems an Eye Exam Can Catch"; American Academy of Ophthalmology; April 2024.



Comprehensive eye exams can detect early signs of more than

270 chronic conditions

including diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease[4]

Screening gaps and opportunities for timely intervention

Despite growing awareness of diabetes, millions of Americans remain undiagnosed or unaware that they are at increased risk. The condition often develops gradually, with symptoms that may be subtle or overlooked until complications begin to emerge. This creates an opportunity for healthcare professionals who regularly interact with patients to help recognize potential warning signs and encourage appropriate medical evaluation when concerns are identified.

Dental and vision providers are uniquely positioned to serve as important touchpoints for preventive health education and awareness. During routine exams, these clinicians may observe physical changes associated with diabetes long before a diagnosis is confirmed. Dentists and dental hygienists may identify persistent gum inflammation, periodontal disease, dry mouth, oral infections or delayed healing. Likewise, optometrists and ophthalmologists may observe retinal changes, microvascular damage, blurred vision or other ocular findings that can signal diabetes or poor glycemic control.

Because many individuals visit their dentist or eye doctor regularly, these encounters provide valuable opportunities to identify potential health concerns and encourage timely medical follow-up. When concerning findings are identified, dental and vision providers can help raise awareness and motivate individuals to seek further evaluation from their physician.

The value of dental and vision benefits extends beyond routine care. These benefits help facilitate access to healthcare professionals who can help identify potential concerns, reinforce preventive care and encourage timely medical follow-up when appropriate.

Coordinated follow-up and member education

Recognizing potential concerns is only the first step. Appropriate follow-up and ongoing education are essential to helping individuals manage their health effectively.

DENTAL AND VISION TEAMS CAN:

- Discuss exam findings that may warrant additional medical evaluation
- Reinforce the importance of medical follow-up
- Provide education on how diabetes affects oral and ocular health
- Encourage adherence to annual dental and comprehensive eye exams
- Promote healthy behaviors that support long-term wellness



For individuals living with diabetes, routine dental and vision care should be considered essential parts of a comprehensive diabetes care plan

The value of preventive dental and vision care

Regular dental and vision visits provide opportunities to:

- Recognize potential signs of diabetes risk and poor glycemic control
- Monitor for oral and ocular complications associated with diabetes
- Educate individuals about the connection between diabetes, oral health and vision health
- Encourage preventive care and healthy behaviors
- Support better long-term health outcomes

When individuals understand how diabetes can affect their eyes and oral health, they are more empowered to take an active role in managing their condition and seeking appropriate care



A clearer path forward

Managing diabetes requires more than medical care alone. Dental and vision providers can play an important supportive role by recognizing potential signs associated with diabetes, monitoring for oral and vision complications and encouraging appropriate follow-up care when concerns arise.

As diabetes rates continue to increase, regular dental and vision exams offer meaningful opportunities to promote health awareness, support preventive care and help individuals stay engaged in their overall health.

To learn more about how dental and vision benefits can support diabetes detection and management, contact your EyeMed account representative