

HEALTH NEWS

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HEALTH NEWS THOUGHTS

The Mouth Body Connection

Diabetes Awareness Month and TMJ Awareness Month

November is Diabetes Awareness Month. Children and adults living with diabetes have special concerns when it comes to keeping their teeth and gums healthy. 21 Million Americans live with diabetes, but many people are unaware of the link between diabetes and the increased risk of tooth and gum disease. But with proper oral health care it can be preventable. Julie Jenks a faculty member at the USC School of Dentistry understands this link well. A clinical professor in the school's Advanced Pediatric Dentistry Program, Jenks was diagnosed with type 1 Diabetes at age 12. According to Jenks, "The best way to control any complications associated with diabetes is to keep the disease in check."

Diabetes is a disorder that affects the way the body produces or processes insulin the hormone that converts sugar, starches and other food into energy that is needed for everyday life. High levels of insulin in the body can contribute to high levels of sugar in the saliva. Saliva is the body's natural mechanism to cleanse itself of bacteria. Jenks says, "If it's not functioning, if you experience dry mouth or mucous saliva, then bacteria will build up." Add this to the way diabetes impairs the body's resistance to infection and delays healing and you have the perfect breeding ground for cavities and gum disease like fungal infections and periodontitis.

Jenks recommends that those with diabetes pay special attention to any changes in their teeth or gums. Regular self-inspections should check for any discolorations, including white patches, in the gums or inner check, which may be evidence of fungal infections. She adds, "Monitor your glucose levels regularly to keep diabetes under control. That is your best line of defense."

November is TMJ Awareness Month. The USC School of Dentistry Oral Facial Pain Medicine Center works with patients experiencing temporomandibular joint or TMJ. Because of its central role in speaking, eating and any other motions involving the jaw, the joint accumulates wear and tear just like knees, hips, and spines.

The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research estimate that over 10 million Americans are affected by TMJ disorders. TMJ problems often manifest as difficulties with opening the jaw during eating or talking. Noises or pain during jaw movement, headaches and other radiating pains in the jaw, neck

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or facial regions. Dr. Glenn Clark, director of the School of Dentistry's Oral Facial Pain Medicine Center adds, "Many patients complain of a painful "clicking" or "popping" sensations in the joint, and some problems can cause the jaw to lock altogether.

With the many problems the joint can face, it takes thorough analysis to make a diagnosis and select the right kind of treatment; it's not just a "one disease, one treatment" approach, Clark says. Treatments range from simple relaxation techniques and exercises, oral or injected pain medication, muscle relaxants, oral stabilization splints or bite guards and in serious cases surgery to repair the joint.

Often times, truly fixing the problem means assessing a person's lifestyle. Stress level and other behavioral or emotional factors can cause physical reactions such as jaw clenching or grinding that lead to discomfort and pain.

If you'd like assistance in further developing these health thoughts in conjunction with Diabetes Awareness Month and TMJ Awareness Month please contact Angelica Urquijo, USC School of Dentistry at (213) 740-6568 office or (213) 271-4189 cell.

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