

Oral Health and Diabetes in Iowa: Bridging the Gap

Many Iowans with diabetes do not receive essential dental care, increasing their risk of preventable health complications. Medical professionals can help address this gap.

Diabetes in Iowa

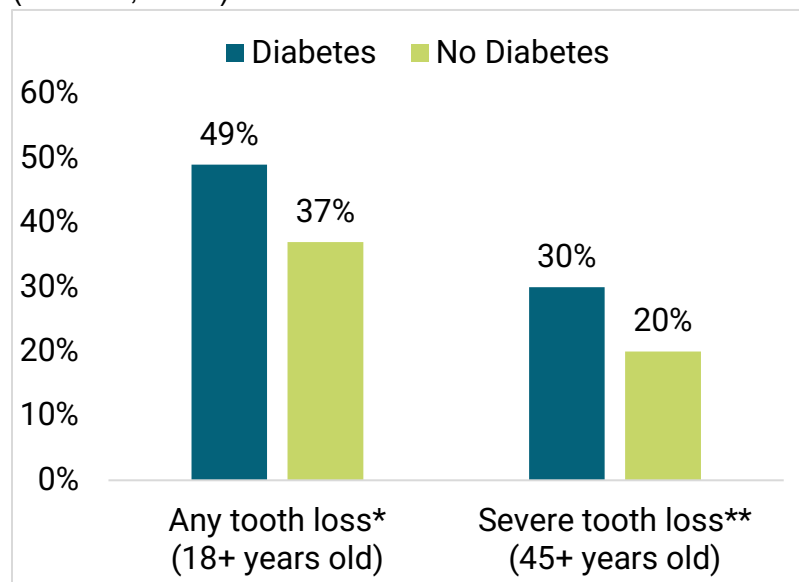
According to 2023 Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data, 11% of Iowa adults aged 18 and older reported being diagnosed with diabetes. Among older adults, the burden is higher — 1 in 5 Iowans aged 65 and older reported being diagnosed with diabetes.¹

The Mouth–Body Connection

Diabetes and oral health are closely connected — each directly affect the other:²

- **Gum disease** is more common in people with diabetes and can make blood sugar harder to control.
- **Dry mouth** is a common side effect of diabetes that increases risk of tooth decay and oral infections.
- **Oral infections** contribute to poor blood glucose control, raising risk of further complications, such as heart or kidney disease.

Figure 1. More **Tooth Loss** for Iowa Adults with Diabetes (BRFSS, 2022)



*Age-adjusted rate

**6 or more teeth

Medical vs Dental Care Utilization

Nearly all Iowa adults with diabetes receive routine medical checkups, but many do not get the dental care they need:



94% of Iowa adults *with* diabetes had a routine **medical checkup** in the past year, compared to **77%** of those *without* diabetes.



Only **64%** of Iowa adults *with* diabetes had a **dental visit** in the past year, compared to **69%** of those *without* diabetes.

Source: IA BRFSS (2022)

Why It Matters

Oral health issues related to diabetes are largely preventable through coordinated care that addresses both oral and overall health. Medical professionals can help by educating patients, encouraging preventive dental care, and teaming up with dentists to provide integrated, comprehensive care. This collaboration helps close care gaps, supports early detection of oral health issues, strengthen diabetes management, and ultimately improves quality of life while reducing long-term healthcare costs.^{2,3}

Partnering for Prevention

Addressing oral and overall health for individuals with diabetes requires a team-based approach:³

Medical Professionals	Dental Professionals	Individuals with Diabetes
Ask about patients' oral health during routine visits	Monitor for signs of diabetes-related oral health issues	Schedule regular dental visits (at least once a year) and inform your dentist about your diabetes
Educate patients about the links between diabetes and oral health	Reinforce importance of blood sugar control to patient to prevent oral complications	Practice good oral hygiene – brush twice daily, floss regularly – and avoid tobacco
Establish referral relationships with dental professionals	Coordinate with medical providers to support integrated care	Work with your healthcare team to manage blood sugar levels and attend recommended checkups

More Information

[Promoting Oral Health | Diabetes | CDC](#)
[Diabetes | American Dental Association](#)
[Diabetes and Oral Health | NIH](#)



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References

¹ Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Iowa BRFSS Brief: 2023 Survey Findings. Published January 2025. Revised April 2025. Web. <https://hhs.iowa.gov/brfss>

² National Association for Chronic Disease Directors. *Oral Health and Chronic Disease*. 2024. [24-09-Oral-Health-and-Chronic-Disease-Pages-Lower-Res.pdf](#)

³ Wanty, N. I., Long, C., Park, B. Z., McNeill, A. R., Malicoate, K., & Phelps, E. *Oral medical care coordination: A systematic literature review and guide forward*. KDH Research & Communication. [Oral Medical Care Coordination | NACDD](#)