

# THE LINK



*The Link is a monthly newsletter published by Delta Dental of New Mexico about the role of dental insurance, and the link between oral health and overall health. Since it includes oral health news, industry news, and Delta Dental updates, it's also our link to you.*

## Dentists Often First to Spot Eating Disorders in Patients

National Eating Disorders Awareness Week runs February 22 – 28 and is sponsored by the National Eating Disorders Association to raise awareness of the dangers surrounding eating disorders and the need for early intervention and treatment. Because Delta Dental of New Mexico recognizes eating disorders as a serious healthcare concern, it also wants to increase awareness of the potential oral health problems that can be caused by eating disorders.

An eating disorder is a complex compulsion to eat in a way which disturbs physical, mental, and psychological health. The three most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder. The eating may be excessive (compulsive over-eating); restrictive; or may include normal eating punctuated with episodes of purging (such as self-induced vomiting, use of laxatives, fasting, diuretics or diet pills). Because the eating may include cycles of binging and purging, or may encompass the ingesting of non-foods (such as dirt, clay or chalk) these disorders rob the body of adequate minerals, vitamins, proteins and other nutrients needed for good health and may cause injury to teeth, muscles and major organs.

“Eating disorders have serious implications for oral health and overall health,” says Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Stomach acids can damage teeth with repeated exposures during purging for those individuals with bulimia nervosa. For those individuals with anorexia nervosa, which is characterized by self-induced starvation, poor nutrition can affect oral health by increasing the risk for periodontal diseases.” As many as 35 million men, women and children suffer from eating disorders in the United States. Dentists are becoming the first line of defense when it comes to spotting eating disorders in patients, according to the Academy of General Dentistry. For example, although parents may not recognize that their child is anorexic or bulimic, they are often still taking the child to a dentist on a regular schedule and the dentist may spot the oral signs of the disease.

Delta Dental of New Mexico supports providing appropriate referral for those individuals with signs and symptoms of eating disorders and encourages those with eating disorders, or those who are caring for individuals with eating disorders to seek care from a dental professional to manage the dental consequences of these disorders.



### Delta Dental of New Mexico Website Resources

When using [deltadentalnm.com](http://deltadentalnm.com) for benefit information, or to get the most recently updated provider directory, don't forget about the other resources available on the website!

There are, as an example, several **oral health flyers** available with varying subjects of interest to enrollees. For Employers, these flyers make great payroll stuffers or lunch room bulletin board reminders about the important of dental care.

To locate the flyers, just **click on the Oral Health link** in the Employer, Subscribers, or Brokers sections.

## Regular Oral Care Improves Whole-Body Wellness

### *Gum Disease-Diabetes Connection Is One Example*

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 571 million people in the United States – have a condition called prediabetes, 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," states to a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. "But recent studies have revealed that periodontal disease can actually influence prediabetes 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. 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 diseases."

- 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 could indicate serious health 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 diseases. 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. 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 right for you.

## Teeth Talk

**Gingivitis** is the early stage of gum disease, which can be treated and reversed if diagnosed early. The signs and symptoms are red, swollen and puffy gums that bleed easily. If treatment is not received, gingivitis could progress into:

**Periodontitis**, an advanced and more serious stage of gum disease which includes bone loss and is not reversible.

### The Delta Dental Difference<sup>SM</sup>

*... one more way Subscribers can benefit from enrollment in Delta Dental of New Mexico plans.*

With all Delta Dental plans, full benefits apply when the network selected by the group is used. Patients who use non-network dentists may have additional out-of-pocket costs (depending on what the individual dentist charges) but there is never a requirement to use only network dentists. Delta Dental subscribers have benefits for covered services with any dentist, anywhere.

If a non-network dentist is used by a patient enrolled in a plan featuring Advantage Network, PPO New Mexico or Delta Dental PPO, the amount of any additional non-network cost can be capped by making sure a Delta Dental Premier dentist is selected. Delta Dental Premier dentists will not balance-bill patients enrolled in any of the other Delta Dental networks for any amount over and above Delta Dental Premier approved fee maximums, regardless of the plan selected by the employer. In addition, dentists in every Delta Dental network will submit a claim on behalf of the patient, eliminating the requirement of many non-network offices for the patient to pay first and wait for reimbursement.

Participating dentists are critical to the success of Delta Dental cost management systems. These dentists agree to charge enrollees no more than the Delta Dental Maximum Approved Fee. Approximately three out of four dentists in the United States are Delta Dental dentists, the largest network in the country.

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