



When speaking with a person living with diabetes

The words we use in healthcare settings, including dental practices, play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of people living with diabetes. Thoughtful communication can reduce stigma, foster trust, and promote positive health outcomes. This guide provides practical strategies to ensure language is respectful, empowering, and supportive during dental consultations.

Prioritise person-first language

- Focus on the individual rather than their condition.
 - Use "person living with diabetes" instead of "diabetic patient."
 - This respects their identity beyond the condition.

Avoid judgemental or stigmatising terms

- Refrain from language that implies blame or failure.
 - Avoid "non-compliant" or "poorly controlled."
 - Use "facing challenges in diabetes management" or "working to stabilise blood sugar levels."
- Such shifts promote a supportive rather than critical tone.

Foster empathy and understanding

- Acknowledge the complexities of living with diabetes.
 - Say "I understand managing diabetes can be challenging, and I'm here to support you."
- This builds rapport and shows genuine care.

Collaborate with the patient

- Encourage shared decision-making and active involvement.
 - Ask "how can we work together to address your oral health concerns?"
 - Collaborative dialogue empowers patients and enhances their commitment to care.

Provide clear and accessible information

- Explain the link between diabetes and oral health without jargon.
 - Say "high blood sugar levels can increase the risk of gum disease, so regular check-ups are important."
- Simplifying complex information ensures understanding and adherence.

Celebrate positive steps

- Positive reinforcement boosts confidence and encourages ongoing effort.
 - Say "you've done a great job maintaining your oral hygiene. That's really important for managing diabetes."

Be mindful of cultural sensitivities

- Recognise that diabetes and oral health perceptions may vary across cultures.
- Ask open-ended questions to understand individual beliefs and practices. Adapt communication to respect cultural nuances.

Use non-verbal communication effectively

- Ensure body language conveys attentiveness and respect.
 - Maintain eye contact and a calm, open posture.
 - Non-verbal cues significantly impact patient comfort and trust.

Application in dental practice

- During medical history reviews use open-ended, non-judgemental questions.
 - Example: "can you share how you're managing your diabetes?"
 - This invites a comprehensive and comfortable discussion.
- When discussing oral health highlight the connection between diabetes and oral health clearly and empathetically.
 - Example: "Good oral health can help manage your diabetes, and we're here to support you with that."
- In treatment planning collaborate to ensure the patient feels involved and valued.
 - Example: "Let's explore the best options for your treatment together."
 - This encourages trust and adherence to the agreed plan.

Effective communication in dental practice goes beyond addressing clinical needs - it is about creating a safe and empowering environment for individuals living with diabetes. By using thoughtful language, promoting collaboration, and respecting each patient's unique journey, dental professionals can foster trust and support better oral and overall health outcomes.

Remember **language matters in diabetes**.

If you'd like to learn more about the global movement of Language Matters in Diabetes, visit:

www.languagemattersdiabetes.com.

References

- Diabetes UK. Language matters: Language and diabetes. Published September 2018. Available at: [https://www.diabetes.org.uk/resources-s3/2018-09/language-matters_language%20and%20diabetes.pdf]
- Language Matters in Diabetes. Available at: <https://www.languagemattersdiabetes.com>.