



5 Questions to Ask Your Dentist

Don't be shy when it comes to your oral health

We all know getting older can affect our overall health. But did you know it affects your teeth, too? As you age, your teeth become less sensitive, and certain medications can make cavities more common.

Changes like that make regular dental checkups even more important the older you get — and can be the difference between preventing dental problems or paying expensive bills to fix the issues later.

Going to the dentist doesn't have to be hard. Just treat your visits like a conversation, rather than a chore. And, since asking questions is a great way to get a conversation started, here are five questions to help you on your way:

1) How is my medication affecting my oral health?

According to the American Dental Association, a dry mouth is a side effect of more than 500 medications. Why does a dry mouth cause dental problems? It means you have less saliva in your

mouth and, since saliva is the mouth's first defense against tooth decay, a dry mouth makes cavities more likely.

If you're experiencing a dry mouth, bring a list of your current medications — including vitamins and supplements — with you for your next checkup. That can help your dentist determine if it's a symptom of a larger oral health concern or a side effect of the medication you're taking.

2) Am I using the right tools?

The old rule you learned as a child of two minutes, twice daily still applies to brushing, but the tools themselves have changed a lot. The advantage of regular, annual checkups is your dentist will keep a history of your oral health and will be ready to give you suggestions on the best brushes, toothpastes, mouthwashes and flosses that are right for you.

For example, there are a variety of toothpastes that are specially formulated to help with sensitive gums or mouthwashes to help



strengthen the enamel on your teeth (loss of enamel can be a side effect of having a dry mouth).

Plus, if arthritis makes it too hard to floss, a water pick may be a better alternative. If something isn't working for you, ask your dentist if there's a better option.

3) What should I look for between checkups?

Six months is still the standard between regular dentist visits, but we need to pay closer attention to our teeth between checkups the older we get. The nerves inside our teeth become less sensitive as we age, meaning pain may no longer be the best sign you have a dental problem.

Your dentist can not only show you examples of what a healthy mouth should look like, he or she can give you a few tips on how to identify any changes in your oral health by simply looking in the mirror.

4) Am I getting enough fluoride?

Fluoride is nature's cavity fighter and was first added to drinking water more than 60 years ago. More and more communities, however, are electing to forego fluoridated water.

Your dentist will know if your local water supply offers adequate fluoride for your particular needs or if you should rely on fluoride pastes and mouthwash.

5) Can I get that in writing?

After spending the time to have an open dialogue with your dentist, the last thing you want is to be uncertain about the plan going forward. After figuring out your plan for care, ask your dentist to write up his or her recommendations.

Information from:
"Healthy Habits" and "Concerns," www.mouthhealthy.org,
accessed Oct. 19, 2012

Your Oral Health Is Too Important to Ignore

More research is pointing to a connection between dental health and overall health, making regular checkups and good communication with your dentist too important to avoid.

If it's high dental bills that keep you from getting the care you deserve, dental insurance can help. Keep your smile healthy and maintain your overall health. A trusted insurance expert can help you with your options.

