

The Importance of Preventive Dental Care

Why you should see your dentist regularly



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The rules for good dental health haven't changed much since you were young. The general guidelines are still brush and floss twice daily and visit the dentist about two times a year. It's easy to remember and easy to do.

Or at least it should be. Brushing, flossing and regular checkups all fall under the general definition of preventive dental care. The goal is to identify and fix small problems before they become big, and potentially costly, issues.

Gum Disease

Gum (or periodontal) disease is one of the major causes of tooth loss in adults and 30-50% of us have it.¹ However, it is often painless and can have subtle or no warning signs, meaning you could have it and not even know it.

That makes those semi-annual trips to the dentist vitally important. Brushing and flossing can help keep gum disease at bay, but only identification by a dentist can truly address a potentially dangerous but easily treatable disease.

Gum disease often starts as gingivitis. A few symptoms to look for include gums that bleed during and after brushing, persistent bad breath or bad taste in the mouth, or red or swollen gums. But remember, you could have gingivitis or gum disease without these warning signs.²

Fillings²

Adults who had cavities filled as children likely have some metal fillings in their mouth. Metal fillings have been the standard for dentists for more than a century due to their durability, but they can wear out or become damaged.

By making regular trips to the dentist, you're ensuring your fillings are receiving regular evaluation for weaknesses. The earlier any such problems are detected, the easier they are to fix.

Oral Cancer²

The National Cancer Institute estimates more than 40,000 people were diagnosed with some form of oral cancer last year. Early detection is the key to minimizing your risk. If you need motivation to keep making regular visits later in life, know you'll be getting a cancer screening each time you settle into the dentist's chair.



Be sure to tell your dentist if you have any problems chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving your tongue or jaw, as they can be side effects of oral cancer.

Overall Health Problems¹

Research shows there are connections between your oral health and your overall health. For example, people with gum disease are almost twice as likely to have heart disease; they are also at a greater risk for pneumonia.

In addition, people with arthritis are eight times more likely to have gum disease.

Diabetes and gum disease are also closely connected. Having diabetes increases the risk for infection in your body, which can lead to gum disease. At the same time, having gum disease increases the amount of inflammation in your body, making it harder to keep your blood sugar under control.

Paying a Little Now Can Mean Saving Big Later

Cost is a major factor with any sort of dental procedure and is often the reason many people avoid going to the dentist. A routine checkup could cost between \$80-\$100, depending on where you live. But even at twice a year, that's significantly less expensive than a crown, root canal or set of dentures, which can start at around \$700.³

That's why preventive care and tackling small problems before they grow bigger is doubly important. It not only keeps you healthy, it saves money.

Another option to help with expensive dental bills is dental insurance. Many dental procedures, both preventive and otherwise, are covered under a variety of dental insurance plans that are relatively inexpensive.



Information from:

- 1 "Oral Health: Insights Into Your Overall Health," by Brenda Conaway and reviewed by Laura J. Martin, MD, www.webmd.com, reviewed Aug. 2, 2011
- 2 "A-Z Topics on MouthHealthy," www.mouthhealthy.org, website of the American Dental Association, accessed Nov. 26, 2012
- 3 "An awkward but important topic: The art of setting fees," Dental Economics 2011 Financial Black Book, story by Rick Willeford, MBA, CPA, CFP, and fee information from Sikka Software Corporation, 2011