

PREVENTIVE CARE AND ORAL HYGIENE

Q What is preventive dentistry?

A Preventive dentistry is the modern way of reducing the amount of dental treatment necessary to maintain a healthy mouth. With the dentist, the hygienist and the patient all working together the aim is to prevent the need for further treatment. This avoids the traditional pattern of fillings and extractions. It is likely that the dentist will work out a course of treatment to get your mouth into excellent condition, and then give you a plan to help you keep it that way.

Q Is preventive possible?

A Yes. With modern dentistry and constant new developments, it is possible to prevent or considerably reduce dental disease.

Q What does preventive dentistry really do?

A It helps you to keep your teeth. The two major causes of tooth loss are decay and gum disease. The better we prevent or deal with these two problems, the more chance people have of keeping their teeth for life.

Q Can everybody benefit from preventive dentistry?

A Yes. Preventive dentistry will benefit anyone with some of their own teeth. It is excellent for children and young people, but it is never too late to start.

Q What is involved?

A Your dentist will first assess your teeth and gums, and discuss with you any treatment you need. The main aim is to help you to get your

mouth really healthy, so that any dental problems do not come back. In a healthy mouth it is unlikely that decay or gum disease will continue to be a problem.

Your dentist will make sure that all your fillings are in good repair and there are no rough edges to make cleaning difficult. The hygienist will thoroughly 'scale and polish' your teeth. The dentist or hygienist will show you the best ways to brush and floss to remove the bacterial 'plaque' which forms constantly on your teeth and gums. You will be advised which is the ideal brush for you to use, very probably one with a small head. The hygienist will probably discuss diet with you and will also explain the importance of cleaning between your teeth.

Q What is plaque?

A Plaque is an invisible film of bacteria, which forms constantly on the teeth and gums. When you eat or drink something sugary, the plaque turns the sugar into acid, which will cause tooth decay. Plaque will also cause gum inflammation if it is not regularly and thoroughly removed. The hard tartar (or 'calculus') which builds up on the teeth also starts off as plaque.

Q How can diet affect my teeth?

A Food and drinks containing sugar cause decay. Having sweet things less often will help a lot. Foods such as cheese, fruit, nuts and vegetables make good substitutes.

Q What can the dentist and hygienist do to help prevent tooth decay?

A Fluoride helps teeth resist decay. If your dentist thinks added fluoride would be useful, they may recommend a fluoride gel. They may also suggest fluoride rinses,

tablets or drops as an extra help against decay for use at home. Only use these if you have been advised to, and follow the instructions carefully.

The biting surfaces of children's teeth can be protected by 'sealants'. These make the tooth surface smoother and easier to clean, and stop decay starting in the difficult-to-clean areas. (See 'Tell me about pit and fissure sealants').

Q What can I do at home?

A The process of getting your mouth healthy doesn't stop. It is very important that you keep up a good routine to keep your teeth and gums healthy at home. This means brushing and flossing as you have been shown, and being careful to check how often you have foods or drinks that will encourage decay.

It is important to brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. There are now many specialised toothpastes including tartar control, ones for sensitive teeth and total care toothpastes. Mouthwashes can help, and again, there are many different types available. Look for products carrying the BDHF logo, which means that the claims made by the manufacturer have been independently checked and are clinically proven.

You will also need regular sessions with your dentist or hygienist to check on the improvement and give you any help and encouragement. Having a healthy mouth does not happen straight away. It may take several months, and will need continual care to keep it that way in the future.

Q What will my dentist recommend:

A A 'preventive dentist' will often recommend treatment to reinforce a tooth to make sure that it does

not break. For example, if the dentist sees that a tooth is cracked, or is weak and in danger of breaking, they may suggest a new filling or perhaps a crown or 'onlay' to protect it. This is always better than waiting till the tooth breaks, and then working out how best to deal with it, perhaps as an emergency.

With the right partnership between patient, dentist and hygienist, preventive dentistry can change the traditional pattern of continuing dental health.

Summary

To have a healthy mouth and teeth you need:

- to remove all plaque every day
- good eating habits- be aware of the danger of having sweet foods often
- regular visits to the dentist to check the condition of your teeth and gums