

CARE FOR YOUR SMILE

Preventative Dentistry

Preventative dentistry relies on good oral hygiene and regular dental care, and it is important throughout your life, whatever your age. By practicing good oral hygiene at home and visiting the doctor regularly, you will help prevent dental problems and save time and money. In the process, you can save your teeth and gums.

Fighting Plaque

By fighting plaque you can keep your teeth for a lifetime. Today, in fact, older adults are keeping their natural teeth longer because of scientific developments and an emphasis on preventative dentistry.

Good oral hygiene requires an understanding of plaque. Plaque is a sticky, colorless layer of bacteria. When you eat carbohydrates (foods made of sugar or starch) you feed this plaque, which in turn produces acids that attack tooth enamel, causes cavities, and develops a hard substance called calculus (tartar). Uninterrupted, the acid attacks can result in tooth decay and gum disease (also known as periodontal disease). If left untreated, gum disease can cause loss of teeth and bone.

At any age, you can begin to fight plaque and keep your teeth and gums healthy. It's really quite easy. Simply:

1. Brush your teeth twice a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste to remove food particles and plaque from the tooth surfaces. While you're at it, brush the top surface of your tongue to eliminate bad breath and bacteria buildup.
2. Clean between your teeth daily with floss or an interdental cleaner. Decay-causing bacteria can linger between teeth where toothbrush bristles can't reach. Flossing removes plaque and food particles from between the teeth and under the gum line.
3. Eat a balanced diet and limit between meal snacks. If a snack is needed, nutritious foods such as raw vegetables, plain yogurt, cheese, or a piece of fruit should be chosen.
4. Schedule regular check-ups. Visit the doctor regularly (every 6 months) for professional cleanings and oral exams.
5. Ask the doctor about dental sealants, a protective plastic coating that can be applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth where decay often starts.
6. Wear mouth protection such as a mouthguard when you play contact sports or extreme sports.

Preventing Tooth Decay

Tooth decay (cavity or caries) can develop on any surface of any tooth. Because cavities grow, they are much easier and less expensive to treat when they are small. A decaying tooth may not hurt, so you may have a cavity and not realize it. The dentist checks for tooth decay at your regular check-ups and will periodically use x-rays to check for decay between teeth. The dentist treats tooth decay by cleaning out the cavity and placing a restoration (filling) in the tooth.

By following the strategies listed above, you can prevent tooth decay.

How to Brush Your Teeth

You should replace your toothbrush every three or four months — or sooner if the bristles become frayed. A worn toothbrush will not do a good job of cleaning your teeth. Children's toothbrushes often need replacing more frequently than adults because they can wear out sooner.

How to Floss Your Teeth

People who have difficulty handling dental floss may prefer to use another kind of interdental cleaner. These aids include special brushes, picks, and sticks. If you use interdental cleaners, ask the doctor about how to use them properly to avoid injuring your gums.

Choosing Dental Products

When choosing any dental product, look for the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance, an important symbol of a dental product's safety and effectiveness. Talk to the doctor about what types of oral care products will be most effective for you. The ADA Seal on a product is your assurance that it has met ADA criteria for safety and effectiveness. Look for the ADA Seal on fluoride toothpaste, toothbrushes, floss, interdental cleaners, oral irrigators, and mouth rinse.

By taking care of your teeth, eating a balanced diet, and visiting the doctor regularly, you can have healthy teeth and an attractive smile throughout your entire life.

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME?

Several factors influence the performance, durability, longevity, and expense of dental restorations. These factors include: the components used in the filling material; the amount of tooth structure remaining; where and how the filling is placed; the chewing load that the tooth will have to bear; and the length and number of visits needed to prepare and adjust the restored tooth.

With so many choices, how do you know what's right for you?

The ultimate decision about what to use is best determined by the patient in consultation with the dentist. Before your treatment begins, discuss the options with the doctor. To help you prepare for this discussion it is helpful to understand the two basic types of dental restorations: direct and indirect.

Direct restorations are fillings placed immediately into a prepared cavity in a single visit. They include dental amalgam, glass ionomers, and composite (resin) fillings. The dentist prepares the tooth, places the filling and adjusts it during one appointment.

Indirect restorations generally require two or more visits. They include inlays, onlays, veneers, crowns, and bridges fabricated with gold, base metal alloys, ceramics, or composites. During the first visit, the dentist prepares the tooth and makes an impression of the area to be restored. The dentist then places a temporary over the prepared tooth. The impression is sent to a dental laboratory, which creates the dental restoration. At the next appointment, the dentist cements the restoration into the prepared cavity and adjusts it as needed.