

### What is Preventative Dentistry?

Preventative Dentistry is the modern way of reducing the amount of dental treatment needed to maintain a healthy mouth. 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.

The joint efforts of the dentist, the hygienist and the patient can help to prevent the need for treatment, avoiding the traditional pattern of fillings and extractions. A course of treatment may be recommended to get your mouth into good condition and a maintenance plan will be worked out to help you keep it that way.

### Can everybody benefit from preventative dentistry?

Yes. Preventative dentistry will benefit anyone with some of their own teeth. People who don't have any teeth can also benefit because conditions such as mouth cancer and denture stomatitis can be spotted during regular visits to the dentist and then treated. It is preventative dentistry is particularly important for children and young people, but it is never too late to start.

### What is involved?

Your dentist will first assess your teeth and gums, and discuss with you any treatment you may need. The main aim is to help you get your mouth really healthy, to try and prevent any dental problems returning. In a healthy mouth it is unlikely that decay or gum disease will continue to be a problem.

- The hygienist or dentist will thoroughly 'scale and polish' your teeth
- The dentist or hygienist will show you the best methods of brushing and flossing to remove the bacterial 'plaque' which forms constantly on your 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 (calculus) which builds up on the teeth also starts off as plaque.
- You will be told which oral care products are the best ones for you to use.
- The hygienist will probably discuss diet and any habits such as smoking and drinking with you.
- Your dentist will also make sure that all your fillings are in good repair and there are no rough edges which may make cleaning difficult.

### Will my dentist recommend treatment?

A 'preventative 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 advise having a new filling or perhaps a crown or 'onlay' fitted to protect it. This is always better than waiting till the breakage happens, and then working out how best to deal with it, perhaps as an emergency.

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

Fluoride helps teeth resist decay. If your dentist thinks added fluoride would be useful, they may recommend applying a fluoride gel. They may also suggest using a fluoride rinse, tablets or drops as an extra help against decay for use at home.

#### What are pit and fissure sealants?

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

#### Can diet affect my teeth?

Food and drinks containing sugar cause decay. If you cut down on how often you have sugary and acidic foods and drinks this will help considerably. Foods such as cheese, fruit, nuts and vegetables make good substitutions.

#### What is dental erosion?

Dental Erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attack. When the enamel is worn away, the dentine underneath is exposed, which may lead to pain and sensitivity

#### Can I prevent Dental Erosion?

Acidic foods, and drinks such as citrus fruit juices and all fizzy drinks such as cola can be harmful if taken in large amounts. Try to limit acidic food and drinks to meal times. It is also recommended that you do not brush your teeth for at least one hour after eating or drinking anything acidic so that your teeth can build up their mineral content again.

#### Can smoking and drinking affect my teeth and gums?

Yes. Smoking can cause tooth staining, gum disease, tooth loss and mouth cancer. If you smoke, you may need to visit the dentist or hygienist more often, but the best advice is to try to give up. Alcoholic drinks can also cause mouth cancer and if you smoke and drink you are more at risk. Some alcoholic drinks contain high sugar levels and some mixed drinks may contain acids. So they can cause decay or erosion if you drink them often and in large amounts.

#### What can I do at home?

It is very important that you keep up a good routine to keep your teeth and gums healthy at home. We recommend that you:

- Brush your teeth for two minutes, twice a day with fluoride toothpaste - this will mean brushing as you have been shown
- Floss your teeth - brushing alone only cleans up to about 60 percent of the surface of your teeth. There are other products you can buy to clean between your teeth (they are called 'interdental brushes').
- Use a mouthwash - this can help to freshen breath. It can also help to dislodge and food debris.

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#### Is there anything else I can do?

Yes. You can take other steps to prevent tooth loss, decay and the need for treatment.

- Cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks
- Use a straw when you have fizzy drinks – this helps the drink go to the back of the mouth and reduces the acid attacks on the teeth.
- Chew sugar-free gum – it stimulates saliva and stops your mouth drying out and can help to prevent dental decay and erosion.
- Visit your dentist regularly, as often as recommended.

#### What oral care products should I use?

There are now many specialised toothpastes, including tartar control, toothpaste for sensitive teeth and total care toothpastes. Mouthwashes also help, and there are different types including antibacterial ones.

Adults should use a toothbrush with a small-to-medium sized head and soft-to-medium filaments. Tests have shown that electric toothbrushes with an oscillating, rotating action are better than manual toothbrushes at removing plaque. If you are unsure ask your dentist or hygienist for advice on the one that best suits your needs. Avoid acidic drinks. So they can cause decay or erosion if you drink them often and in large amounts.