

Smiles Better

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A lesson in Oral Hygiene!

This month I thought I'd give you all a lesson in Oral Hygiene! When most people think about cosmetic dentistry they think about tooth whitening, veneers, crowns and implants...the perfect Hollywood smile! But before you undergo tooth whitening or cosmetic treatment you must have healthy gums and once you have your crowns or veneers fitted you must adopt an efficient oral hygiene routine, indeed for some people the best cosmetic treatment is achieving healthy gums.

As all of my patients will know I'm continually talking about tooth brushing and flossing.

I love to see clean healthy teeth. Most people are aware and do brush twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste, many patients are aware of floss but hate using it or feel they can't use it.

So why do I love talking about it?

Effective brushing only removes plaque build-up on the outer surfaces of the teeth, but what about the surfaces where the teeth touch each other?

Floss is designed to clean these areas where the toothbrush does not reach. By not flossing the food particles left begin to decompose and form plaque, decay will occur in these areas and you may find your gums become inflamed and bleed. I'm sure nearly all of us have had bleeding gums at some stage and thought it was normal. Bleeding gums (Gingivitis) is the earliest stage of gum disease. It's caused when the plaque left

behind from poor toothbrushing or flossing builds up and may harden to form tartar. Plaque contains harmful bacteria which produce toxins which in turn cause an inflammatory reaction, the gums become puffy and swollen and then bleed when you brush or floss. Some people think they've done something wrong and so avoid brushing areas where the teeth are bleeding and stop flossing...

don't! This stage of gum disease is easily reversible. When your gums bleed you need to floss more and take extra care when brushing.

The next step of gum disease is Periodontitis also known as pyria. The bacteria which cause gingivitis begin to cause an inflammatory reaction to the fibers which hold your teeth in the bone. This damage is irreversible. Your gums may recede, and teeth become longer. You may find you start to have gaps between the teeth which food sticks in and you may complain of having a bad taste in your mouth or bad breath. Your gums will begin to form pockets below the gum line where the bacteria accumulate along with food debris. This stage of gum disease needs specialist deep cleaning with a hygienist to clean below the gum to remove build-up and bacteria. You will be given advice on improving your oral hygiene routine and recommended toothpastes and mouthwashes to combat disease. Although you can not reverse periodontitis the aim is to maintain bone levels and to prevent the disease becoming advanced. With advanced periodontal disease teeth become loose and eventually will fall out due to the lack of bone.

This all sounds frightening, but what I find frightening is the number of people who have periodontitis but are unaware.

The risk factors for Periodontitis are:

- **SMOKING:** this is the most significant risk factor associated with the development of gum disease.
- **DIABETES:** people with diabetes are more prone to developing infections, including gum disease
- **GENETIC SUSCEPTIBILITY:** it may be hereditary
- **MEDICATIONS:** Some medications reduce the amount of saliva you produce. Saliva naturally cleanses the mouth and helps prevent disease. Some medications cause the gums to enlarge and swell making them more difficult to clean.
- **POOR ORAL HYGIENE**

If you have any of the symptoms I've



discussed or you think you may be at risk of gum disease please visit your dentist for a full check-up and ask about seeing the hygienist.

So hopefully now you understand why dentists talk so much about brushing and the importance of flossing!!



MY TOPS TIPS FOR A CLEAN HEALTHY AND FRESH MOUTH:

- Brush twice daily with a fluoride tooth paste
- Floss daily
- Brush your tongue
- Stop smoking
- Visit your dental hygienist