

A Problem With Teeth

Teeth work best when they remain unnoticed. For many people, life moves forward and their teeth stay relatively obscure. Regular cleanings and check ups maintain the status quo and daily brushing and flossing keep cavity bugs in check and gums healthy. Life with healthy teeth is good. It is only truly appreciated when things go bad.

One fine day, the bad news arrives. A regular check up reveals a small cavity or crack that can be fixed with a conservative tooth colored restoration. This theoretical defect is confined to the outer enamel layer of the tooth or just barely into the secondary protective layer called dentin. "But Doc," you say, "it really isn't bothering me. Can't we put it off a bit?"

Doing nothing is always an option.

Time marches on. A recall dental cleaning appointment gets missed because something comes up at work. Then comes summer vacation, the Fourth of July picnic, and back to school. Ten months go by.

A postcard comes in the mail that a cleaning appointment is overdue. Your next dental visit shows that the cavity has grown. The tooth might now need a cap or crown because so much tooth has been damaged. "But Doc," you say, "it only bothers me when I chew ice or drink Mammy's super sweet iced tea. Let's look again next time."

Doing nothing is always an option.

A little more time passes. For the most part, the tooth remains unnoticed. Then, *it* happens. *It* can be an olive pit, an unpopped popcorn kernel, chewing gum, a chicken bone, a toasted sandwich...anything you put in your mouth can be the final straw.

The problem with *it*, is that *it* never happens at a good time. I once had a crown break off while coaching a Little League team...for my dentist's kids. Usually *it* occurs on a Friday night...or vacation. More times than not, *it* causes pain.

The cavity has now progressed to an extent that a root canal and crown are required. It is possible that the tooth could be unrepairable. Even with insurance benefits, the cost to repair the tooth may be ten times more than the initial filling would have been. Time marches on, but now, doing nothing is no longer an option.

The true problem with teeth is that small cavities rarely cause pain. When a tooth starts to hurt, that means a problem is getting close to the nerve and a root canal is probable. Time marches on. Sometimes, doing nothing is not the best option.

May 2011 find you healthy and wise.

Until next year, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at www.ParrishDental.com.