

Growing Up...

There are really very few certainties in life. A lot of what I learned in school, not *that* long ago, has changed or been improved upon. I imagine most of what I know to be true about oral health today will have changed in some way, shape, or form by the time I'm done fixing teeth. That's life. It's a constant process to keep up and I'm lucky to enjoy that process. All you have to do is make a choice each day; get a little better or don't. I strive for the former.

One true constant is that we all move a little closer to our demise each day. It is universal and aging certainly beats the alternative. We all grow up, at least in some aspects, whether we want to or not. Advances in medicine keep inching our life expectancies higher and higher. That's a great thing, but it can also present new challenges as we age. Here are a few concerns to remember as you grow up.

Maintenance is the key. - Studies have actually shown that people who have a healthy mouth are healthier as they age than those who do not. It is easier to maintain your teeth and gums through routine care than it is to go back and replace them later. Brushing after every meal with a soft brush and fluoride toothpaste is a great start. Daily flossing removes plaque below your gums and between your teeth and helps prevent gum disease. Routine check-ups allow your dentist to catch small problems before they become big ones.

Fight dry mouth (xerostomia). - Your saliva plays a large role in keeping you cavity free. Disease, certain medications, or cancer treatments can cause your salivary glands to quit working. No saliva usually means a lot of cavities that develop really fast. Dry mouth can be treated with over-the-counter saliva substitutes, by drinking lots of water, by chewing sugar free gum, and even with certain prescription medicines. Avoiding sweets, tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine also may help.

Remain oral cancer free. - Oral cancer tends to occur in older populations and has one of the lowest five year survival rates of any type of cancer. If you have any of the following signs: red or white patches on your oral tissues, bleeding in your mouth, pain or problems swallowing, loose teeth, numbness in or around your mouth, or soars that fail to heal within a couple of weeks; see a dentist right away. Early detection is the key to survival here.

Maintain lifetime home care. - We see a lot of patients for whom arthritis makes tooth brushing difficult. There are a variety of aids (electric toothbrushes, water picks, electric flossers, etc.) that can help keep hard to reach teeth clean. Sometimes, the answer can be as simple and economical as taping your brush to a ruler to give you a better grip or longer reach.

Replace old dental work before it is too late. - Nothing lasts forever. The best work that any dentist can do has a shelf life. We spend a lot of time replacing worn out dental restorations. This is no excuse to just let your teeth fall apart, just be prepared to have those old silver-mercury fillings replaced some day. It is always easier on you to re-work old restorations before they hurt or break, rather than try to salvage a painful or fractured tooth.

Just remember that it is never too late to have a healthy mouth. The older we get, the more important that seems to be. When you can fit dentistry into your life, come on by, we'll be here.

Until next time, keep smiling.

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