

Santa Comes Early...Laser Cavity Detection

As I write this, my kids are resting up for a week of Christmas to come. Between grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and old Saint Nick, Christmas has become a weeklong celebration for our crew. We are truly blessed to have such a great extended family and for that I give holiday thanks. I hope that the same holds true for you and yours.

Although Santa's visits seemed to stop long ago for me, an early gift is to arrive in our office any day now. We are soon to be the proud owners of a laser caries detection device. Isn't that what everyone asked of Santa for Christmas?

Laser cavity detectors have actually been around for a few years now. As with any technology, they have been getting better and more affordable each of those years. The premise behind their accuracy is quite simple. Decayed (cavity) tooth structure reflects light differently than healthy tooth structure. Shine a laser into a tooth and you can tell if a cavity is hiding inside.

For most people, cavities start in the pits and grooves of the chewing surfaces of their teeth. Remnants of food get stuck on the tops of teeth and feed bacteria who, in turn, cause decay. Initially, these cavities do not show up on x-rays. Laser cavity detectors can accurately catch these cavities in their early stages. This turns a possible root canal and crown into a simple filling. In other words, catching the cavity early saves patients' time, pain, and money. Most are happy with all of the above.

So how does this all work? The process is quite simple. The surfaces of the teeth to be examined are first cleaned of debris. Then, the laser, which looks like a bent pen with a red glowing tip, is used to trace the grooves and pits of the teeth. When the laser finds a suspicious or weakened area of tooth structure, the cavity detector beeps to alert the user. The area can then be retraced and a numerical reading is given that tells how deeply the tooth is decayed. This reading can be used by a dentist to determine the course of treatment to be recommended. The whole process is completely safe, pain free, and only takes a minute or two.

May you all enjoy your Christmas as much as I plan to enjoy mine. Feliz Navidad!

Until next week, keep smiling.

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