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Oral Health



Celia's Story

I started having pain in my mouth about 10 months ago. At first I just ignored it. I hoped it would go away on its own. But it didn't. I told my

daughter about it and she said, "Mom, you need to see a dentist." But I didn't make an appointment. I was afraid. I waited several more months and the pain got worse and worse. Then, my gums started bleeding when I brushed my teeth. Now I was really nervous to see the dentist. I was afraid and thought the treatment would hurt worse than the pain I was already having. Also, I felt embarrassed that I had waited so long to make an appointment. So my daughter made the appointment for me. She even went with me to the dentist. And do you know what? It wasn't bad at all! Dental treatments have gotten so much better! I explained to my dentist that I was very anxious, and she made sure that I was comfortable through my whole visit. Now I plan to schedule regular cleanings to keep myself healthy!

Q: What is oral health?

A: The word "oral" refers to the mouth, which includes your teeth, gums, jawbone, and supporting tissues. Taking good care of your oral health can prevent disease in your mouth. Oral health can affect the health of your entire body. Good oral health does not just mean you have pretty teeth. Your whole mouth needs care to be in good health.

Q: What are the most common oral health problems?

A: The most common oral health problems are cavities and gum disease.

Cavities

We are all at risk of tooth decay, or cavities. (Cavities look like chalky white and/or brown holes on your teeth). Bacteria (germs) that naturally live in our mouths use sugar in food to make acids. Over time, the acids destroy the outside layer of your teeth. Then cavities and other tooth harm occur.

Gum diseases

Gum diseases are infections caused by bacteria, along with mucus and other particles that form a sticky plaque on your teeth. Plaque that is left on teeth hardens and forms tartar. Gingivitis (jin-juh-VEYE-tuhss) is a mild form of gum disease. It causes red, swollen gums. It can also make the gums bleed easily. Gingivitis can be caused by plaque build-up. And the longer plaque and tartar stay on teeth, the more harm they do. Most gingivitis can be treated with daily brushing and flossing and regular cleanings at the dentist's office. This form of gum disease does not lead to loss of bone or tissue around the teeth. But if it is not treated, it can advance to periodontitis (pair-ee-oh-don-TEYE-tuhss). Then the gums pull away from the teeth and form infected "pockets." You may also lose supporting bone. If you have periodontitis, see your dentist for treatment. Otherwise your teeth may loosen over time and need to be removed.

Your risk of gum disease is higher if you:

- Smoke
- Have a disease such as diabetes or HIV/AIDS
- Use methamphetamine

