



Prevention Works

For a long time, prevention, focused on common medical conditions, has been proven to work quite successfully. We know what we need to do to stay healthy. Routine exercise, balanced nutrition, moderation in consuming alcohol and a tobacco-free lifestyle will help us avoid many chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease and some cancers.

Now, take the success of prevention in medicine and apply it to dental disease. It also works—very successfully! So, let's review what oral disease prevention techniques can be used to keep our mouths healthy. Prevention of infection and inflammation in the mouth translates into helping patients improve their overall health too. Research proves that some chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke are linked to oral infection and inflammation. Good oral hygiene habits include brushing, flossing, use of fluoride toothpaste, avoiding sugary and acidic snacks and beverages.

A very important part is routine professional dental care. At least once per year, everyone should visit his or her dentist. A thorough oral exam is the only way to know if any hidden problems are brewing. Your dental hygienist will clean your

teeth and teach you the best way to adjust your homecare to be most effective. This is the opportunity to use additional preventive methods such as fluoride varnish and sealants.

National data on the success of prevention using sealants is well documented. A sealant can prevent the first cavity in the chewing surfaces of permanent molars. But since that first filling isn't needed, neither is the replacement filling or the crown or root canal that could follow years of maintaining that restored tooth. Why not just seal it?

Fluoride has been shown to be the most cost effective decay preventative, ever. But not everyone needs the same amount from their dental provider. If a patient has none or very few cavities, they are at low risk and can do quite well without fluoride varnish. However, what about the patient with many cavities, routinely needing more fillings? That patient is at high risk and needs frequent preventive visits to the dentist that include fluoride varnish.

One size does not fit all. Not in medicine and not in dentistry. Talk to your dental providers and ask what you need to have a healthy mouth.