

## A Dead Tooth...

Somewhere around ten years old, I had a face to face meeting with an elementary school basketball court. Actually, it was a tooth to tile meeting and the tile, of course, won. A piece of one of my two front teeth was broken off and my lip was bloodied. A tooth colored filling did the trick until I finished growing and then a more esthetic porcelain ceramic crown (cap) was placed. All seemed well.

Fast forward about fifteen years. I was in dental school learning about teeth and my adjacent (I had always assumed healthy) front tooth started to turn an ugly yellow color. Luckily, I was soon to be married to an excellent dentist and she fixed them both at no charge. It seemed that she did not want to say "I do," to an ugly crown and a yellow tooth. I cannot imagine why.

So what happened? How can a tooth seem stable for years and then all of a sudden change color? It happens all the time.

Each of our teeth is blessed with their very own blood flow (veins and arteries) and nerve fibers. This gives them the ability to heal themselves when faced with minor everyday problems. Under the rarest of circumstances, a tooth can have bacterial decay into the nerve chamber and fight off the infection for months or years. Eventually, the bacteria will win, but I have seen really infected teeth that patients claim to have never given them trouble. Because of their blood flow, teeth can also sometimes heal themselves from trauma, or at least put off the inevitable, as in my case. In many instances, a traumatic blow will damage a tooth on the inside (by killing the blood flow and nerve) with very little damage to the outside of the tooth. The tooth may go years without problems (no nerve means no pain sensation). Eventually, though, the tooth will turn yellow or gray from all of the dead tissue inside it. When this occurs on a front tooth, most people have a problem.

There are multiple ways of fixing a discolored front tooth. Sometimes, a root canal followed by bleaching the tooth from within will solve the esthetic problem. Other times, a crown or porcelain facing (veneer) are better treatment choices. Tooth colored filling material can even be used to mask these teeth, if needed in a pinch. It all depends on the tooth, the bite, the mouth, the dentist, and the patient.

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish through their website at [www.ParrishDental.com](http://www.ParrishDental.com).