

Keeping Your Options Open (Bone Grafting, Part1)...

One thing life has taught me is that options are a good thing. The more choices one has, the more likely events will work out positively. A variety of options often gives one the time needed to make a rational, informed decision. In other words, the right decision.

There are circumstances when teeth are not salvageable and must be removed. Often, these circumstances are accompanied by some type of toothache or trauma that makes rational thought more difficult. To put it simply, it is hard for any of us to think straight when we are in pain. This is understandable.

When a tooth is to be removed or extracted, there is often an important decision to be made...to bone graft or not to bone graft. That is the question. In other words, would you like to immediately fill that hole where your tooth used to be or would you like your body to fill the socket slowly over the next few months?

We are talking about bone grafting for ridge preservation. That is dental-speak for packing some type of bone into the hole just after a tooth is removed. The procedure is usually quite simple and the advantages are many.

Multiple studies show that somewhere around thirty percent of the surrounding bone is lost in the first six months after a tooth is extracted. The bone around your teeth is there to hold teeth and it goes away when teeth are removed. This has several ill effects, such as loss of bone supporting adjacent teeth and depressions or defects where the tooth used to be. These defects can make any type of tooth replacement look less than acceptable. Weak teeth on either side of a toothless space limit tooth replacement options. If too much bone is lost, our best tooth replacement option (dental implants) may be impossible or much more expensive. In other words, keeping bone when a tooth is lost gives you options.

Not all teeth to be extracted are good candidates for bone grafting. Infection or lack of healthy surrounding bone can make grafting less successful. When an extraction site is a good candidate, the only disadvantage to grafting bone is the cost. Bone graft material is meticulously regulated and processed and therefore, expensive. Grafting bone to a single site usually doubles the cost of having the tooth removed. The good news is that we are seeing more and more dental insurance plans supplement this cost for our patients.

As exciting as this has been, we're out of newspaper space. Next week we'll discuss the actual process of keeping that bone where it is supposed to be.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Questions and comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish through their website: www.ParrishDental.com.