

Maintaining Your Dental Work...

Nothing lasts forever.

That is a fortunate fact if you are talking about sitting through an animated children's movie for the fifty-seventh time or have ever had a baby with colic. On the other hand, there are some things that we would all just as soon last as long as possible. I think we can agree that dental work falls into the latter category.

So what can be done to make your restorations (crowns, veneers, fillings, bridges, etc.) last as long as possible? Fortunately, there is a lot you can do. You can help prevent disease in your mouth and make your restorations last.

Home Care – We have all heard the story about brushing and flossing. I certainly do not want to beat that dead horse. There are a variety of other aids that help to keep your teeth clean, but there's no way around the old standby. You don't have to brush and floss all of your teeth, just the ones you want to keep.

Fluoride – Topical fluoride, whether prescription strength or over-the-counter, helps prevent cavities under and around dental work. It can also help with hot and cold sensitivity. Most toothpaste has fluoride and you can supplement that with a rinse before bed. Your dentist can also make special trays that apply fluoride in higher doses.

Xylitol Gum – Chewing sugar free gum sweetened with xylitol has shown to help prevent tooth decay on teeth and around dental work. It appears that the xylitol disrupts the bacteria that cause cavities. Chewing sugarless gum also stimulates salivary flow that keeps the bacteria in your mouth from dissolving your teeth.

Diet – Sugar is not the only culprit. Any processed food that sits on your teeth for an extended period of time (anything sticky) can feed the bacteria that cause cavities. Constantly sipping on a diet soda (bathing your teeth in acid) all day can also help those bacteria to dissolve your teeth away. If you need to sip, water is your best bet for healthy restorations.

Medications – Modern medicines can help slow down or regulate a lot of disease processes. A common side effect of many of these drugs is loss of salivary function or dry mouth. Cavities tend to grow very fast when your saliva isn't fighting them off, so use a saliva substitute or constantly sip water to keep your mouth moist and your teeth happy.

Regular Cleanings – Clean mouths equal healthy, longer lasting restorations. The amount of time between professional cleanings varies from person to person. Some people tend to build plaque faster and need more frequent cleanings to keep bacteria at bay. I know because I'm one that has to get my teeth cleaned every two to three months. Ask your dentist or hygienist what is right for you.

Regular Check-Ups – It's always nice to catch a failing restoration early, rather than late. Annual or bi-annual check-ups with dental x-rays catch a lot of smaller problems before it's too late. As with everything else in life, small problems caught early are easier to fix than bigger problems that have been put off. Listen to your body when something doesn't feel right and get it checked out.

If we've saved one tooth with a helpful hint this week, I'll consider that a success. Hopefully, we've saved many. Until next time, keep smiling.

-Questions or comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental@aol.com.