

The Right Time...

Throughout life, it seems that events happen in clusters. A dental office is no different. We may go three weeks without seeing one root canal patient and then see three in one day. The same goes for implants, dentures, veneers, TMD, broken crowns...you name it and it probably comes in spurts.

Last week, we saw a disheartening group of toothaches. In walked a half dozen great patients who were diagnosed for small fillings at various times in the past. Back then, none of these small cavities hurt and it was easy to let life supersede a visit to the dental office. Understandable. It happens all the time. If my tooth isn't hurting, I can probably put it off until my next cleaning visit, right?

Wrong.

Unfortunately, for these patients, all of those small cavities had grown to the point that they now were causing severe pain and required immediate treatment. Of those six, not one was treatable with a filling. Half of them were so badly decayed that they had to be removed. The other half required treatment that cost the patients and their insurance five to ten times as much as that simple filling would have. As an added bonus, these patients dealt with the pain of a toothache and got to miss extra days of work and/or school. Not a fun experience for anyone.

The point here is not to scold. Going to the dentist is rarely a priority for anyone. Dental treatment is very easy to put off, especially in the early stages, when things do not hurt. Or on a sunny Spring day when the golf course is calling. Small cavities, early stage gum disease, and old corroded fillings are rarely painful. The problem comes when they do start to hurt because this means that the nerve of the tooth is involved and treatment begins to be much more complicated.

Last week, we filled a cluster of teeth with small cavities. We replaced a bunch of old, rotten fillings and helped to keep all of those teeth healthy for years to come. I can think of a dozen patients we saw last week who have stopped their gum disease. Good things also come in groups.

When we diagnose a problem, especially one that doesn't yet hurt, the same question comes up time after time. "Well, doc, how long do you think I can wait before I get this treatment done?"

After my first couple hundred times of fielding this question, I finally came up with an appropriate answer. Trying to explain the disease process and the importance of preventative treatment never really seemed to work. All I say now, is the truth.

"You can fix this tooth whenever it fits your schedule. Please just make sure to give us a call the day before your tooth breaks or hurts so we can try to work you in."

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at www.ParrishDental.com.