

Where Do Cavities Happen?

For some of us, cavities are a fact of life. Many cavities are preventable through the use of fluoride toothpastes and rinses, regular check-ups, good brushing and flossing habits, and a healthy diet. Unfortunately, there are certain disease and genetic factors that can make some of us more prone to dental decay. Many common medications can also cause xerostomia or dry mouth that leads to new cavities later in life.

Several past articles have discussed how and why cavities happen. To summarize: tooth plus bacteria plus food can equal decay (cavities). Remove one of the three factors (dentures and implants do not get cavities) and decay rarely occurs. The problem is that bacteria cannot be totally eliminated (some are actually “good” bacteria) and we generally would like to keep our teeth and our meals intact. Therefore, preventative maintenance is our means of keeping cavities at bay.

Prevent the build-up of bacterial cities (colonies) on teeth and you prevent cavities. Most of what gets done in a dental office has to do with removing these bacteria. The other ninety-nine percent of the time is up to you.

One of the most common types of cavities occurs in the grooves, nooks, crannies, and natural anatomy of teeth. All those crevices are great for bacteria to hide in. On top of that, where does food usually get stuck? If you’ve ever seen a four year old eat Oreos, that’s obvious. Brushing usually clears out these grooves and dental sealants can help to prevent anything from getting into them in the first place.

Flossing removes the bacteria that hide in between teeth where a toothbrush cannot go. Flossing cavities are usually found on routine dental x-rays. If you have a spot between teeth where food often gets stuck, chances are it will decay, unless it is kept extremely clean. Annual check-ups and radiographs help to catch these cavities before they get too big.

One of the best places for bacteria to hide is around an old crown or silver filling. No matter what the restoration is made of, there will always be a margin where the filling/crown and tooth come together. Dentists go to extreme measures to make these margins smooth and tightly sealed. Over time, if not properly cleaned and maintained, these margins can degrade and let bacteria in. The mouth is a harsh place and when bacteria get in and under old dental work, they do their business and cause decay. The best dental work is only as good as it is maintained.

That’s a quick summary of where, why and how. If I could predict *when* these events were going to happen, I probably wouldn’t be a dentist. Vegas or Wall Street would be a lot easier.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send questions and comments to Drs. Parrish through www.ParrishDental.com.