

Which Tooth Cleaning Is Right For You?

One of the easiest ways to maintain the health of your teeth and gums are routine dental cleanings. Having your teeth cleaned by a dentist or dental hygienist on a regular basis reduces the amount of plaque and bacteria that live on and in between your teeth. The less bacteria around your mouth, the less likely you will develop tooth decay. Calculus (tarter) build up also leads to chronic gum inflammation that can cause problems for your overall health if left unchecked. If untreated, that inflammation (periodontitis or gum disease) can cause you to lose the bone that holds your teeth in place, eventually causing your teeth to fall out. It's a disease process that we fight every day.

There are several different types of dental cleanings loosely based on how healthy the teeth and gums are, as well as how complicated the cleaning will be. In other words there is a difference in the type of cleaning and treatment that your dentist provides based on the condition of your teeth and gums. Someone who brushes and flosses three times a day and accumulates little plaque has different cleaning needs than someone with advanced, severe gum disease, bleeding gums, and bone loss. Without going into a lot of boring detail about the stages and advancement of gum disease, let's look at the big picture and a few of the different ways your cleaning might be performed.

Dental Prophylaxis – This is the routine, disease free tooth cleaning that we all strive for. Prophylaxis means to prevent, so this type of care is to prevent gum disease. If you have active gum disease in your mouth, you will generally need more extensive treatment. There can also be different levels or types of these “healthy mouth” cleanings depending on plaque build-up and other health issues.

Gross Debridement – We often see patients that have not been able to have their teeth cleaned in years. Often, these patients will have swollen, bleeding gums that may appear to be worse off than they actually are. Sometimes the build-up can be so thick that it hides cavities, and even teeth from plain sight. In these cases we clean the teeth above the gums as best we can and then give the body a few weeks to heal. We can then come back and get an accurate diagnosis of the extent of the gum disease.

Scaling and Root Planing (Deep Cleanings) – SCRCP is the initial treatment modality for active gum disease. As bacteria accumulate between your teeth and under your gums, you start to develop pockets of gum tissue that cannot be cleaned out with a toothbrush or floss. The bugs that cause gum disease thrive in these pockets and can cause you to lose bone around your teeth. To clean down into these areas, some type of anesthetic is often necessary to keep you comfortable. In some cases, antibiotics can be placed in these pockets after cleaning to help eliminate as many disease causing bacteria as possible.

Periodontal Maintenance – After scaling, we want to do everything possible for you to remain pocket free. Periodontitis or gum disease is a constant low grade bacterial infection. It is an infection that we can treat and you can often control, but neither of us can completely cure. Deep cleanings and antibiotics remove most of the bacteria and allow your gums to return to normal, but there are always bugs hiding and waiting for the right time to go forth and multiply. Periodontal maintenance cleanings help to make sure those bugs don't get back in control of your mouth and cause you to lose your teeth.

These are a few of the most common types of dental cleanings. Hopefully, this has helped to clear up the common misconception of the “one size fits all” tooth cleaning. If not, drop me a note and I'll be glad to help. Until next time, keep smiling.

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