

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT?

Dear Dr McCrummen: I am of the philosophy that, "If it ain't broke don't fix it"! It seems like my dentist wants to fix things, like cracked teeth and cavities, before they bother me. I think it is a waste of money. Some things have been suggested, like stopping a cavity with a "sealant", or putting a filling in a cavity that is found with a LASER. If that metal probe tool doesn't stick in the tooth like when I was a kid, why mess with it? I would rather wait until I know there is a problem. M.K.

These are questions that dentists hear frequently. Using the old "metal probe" as our only diagnostic tool for a cavity was all that could be done many years ago. Dentists crown/cap many teeth today, or "pull" them because the probe caught problems too late, lead to large fillings which weakened teeth that break later, then need root canals and caps, or removal. Preventing one tooth from getting a cavity can easily save over \$3,000 on treatment of that one tooth over it's lifetime; we normally have 28-32 teeth.

The current preventive advice is almost guaranteed to keep dental health care costs down, eliminate the need for future re-treatment, reduce risks of pain, prevent loss of sleep, days of work, disruption on vacation, an inconvenient emergency visit, and provide you with more pleasant dental office experiences. It also reduces the need for dental insurance.

"If it ain't broke don't fix it"?? A better adage to choose is, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Broke = increased costs and inconvenience. Prevent = save money and preserve comfort. Flossing and brushing costs very little time and effort. and only pennies a day. Preventive dental visits save a lot of future expense and promote good health. A \$ sealant or a \$\$ small filling, can save you \$\$\$\$+ in repairs, multiple visits, discomfort, and future retreatment.

How is "broke" defined? Many dental patients define it as "when something hurts". Disease often does not cause awareness or pain until it is far along. Examples are things such as cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, the flu, and cavities and gum disease. What can be done to "prevent such things? Proper diet, exercise, periodic examinations to catch problems early, a vaccination, and following the dentist's advice on prevention or early treatment of a small or potential problem. A "sealant" at any age is like vaccinating a tooth. Dental disease is preventable, which means you can reduce your dental expenses by what you do now, by not waiting until something is "broke".

What is the value of comfort and good health? How good are we to ourselves and others, or functioning in our job or enjoying retirement when we are in pain or not healthy?

"Broke" (as in pieces, or lack of money) is what your dentist or hygienist is trying to save you from at each visit. What can your dental team do to help you save money? Advise you to brush and floss properly each day, use fluoride, recommend products and demonstrate their use, being seen regularly, reducing the intake of sweets, avoidance of certain things, stopping bad habits, as well as such things as helping to prevent the most common type of cavity by searching with a diagnostic laser, sealing the small grooves where the bacteria live, and fix problems when they are small. If you listen to your dental team you will hear at each visit that they are really trying hard to improve your health and save you a lot of money.