

SEASONAL SAVINGS SUGGESTIONS

The holiday season approaches, and with it comes sweet treats, fun times, and gatherings of family and friends. There are some things to be aware of to help reduce end-of-year dental woes and expenses.

Between Halloween and The New Year dentists can expect to see many broken teeth. We often hear, "I guess this crown will have to be my Christmas present". The cause is often a hard piece of Peanut Brittle or a piece of nut shell in a cookie. Be careful what you chose to bite down on; avoid crunching ice and hard candy. A broken tooth or missing filling is usually not an emergency, but it can bother the tongue, worry you, and be sensitive to cold temperatures so keep it clean and avoid what bothers it. Brush with a baking soda toothpaste and call your dental office for an appointment unless pain is steady and severe.

It is hard to take the "treat" out of "trick or treat". Kids will eat sweets, and so will adults. The tasty *Candy Corn* from Halloween, plates of cookies during Thanksgiving, bowls of red and green *M&M's* for Christmas all increase the risk of tooth decay. Fall and winter treats can lead to fillings in the spring and summer, root canals by the next fall or winter. The truth is, the better you take care of your teeth, the more you may be able to get away with, dentally. If you floss, brush, and fluoridate your teeth *every* day, they will be more resistant to cavities, and that saves you money and dental treatment. Parents, take charge of your children's dental health and nutrition. Monitor their treats and be sure they do what is necessary to reduce their dental treatment experiences, and *your* costs. Think how much you will be helping them by sharing their treats!

Sticky sugars, like caramels and toffee, stick around long after being chewed and swallowed. Sugary gum, breath mints, and cough drops can do serious damage very quickly. Drink water right after eating sweet treats, or chew *sugarless* gum to dilute sugar and acids. It is a long proven fact that fluoride hardens, desensitizes, and protects teeth, can stop decay in the early stages, reverse early decay, and even help rebuild the teeth, all very safely. Sweeteners, such as *Xylitol*, *Splenda*, and *Stevia* can satisfy a sweet tooth without decay problems. Xylitol studies show a strong cavity fighting effect. Sugar acids attack teeth within 15 minutes so change your sweeteners, dilute the acids, use a toothpaste containing baking soda, and have clean teeth *before* you eat sweets.

If insurance is involved, plan ahead as it usually expires by January 1st. Year-end calls can lead to frustration for both the patient and their dental office that already has a full schedule. Crowns may take two to four weeks to be made, and must be in the mouth *before* January 1st. Mail can be very slow, there can be unexpected delays, dental laboratories may be too busy, and businesses are often closed during the holidays. Maximize your yearly benefits by planning ahead.

Other savings suggestions: 1) Try to pay your dental bills before the end of the year for a bigger health care tax deduction and less interest, 2) Use a credit card with airline or other benefits, 3) Paying in full at the time of service can provide an instant courtesy discount by reducing billing costs in many offices, 4) Dental disease is mankind's most common disease and it is usually preventable. Have your dentist vaccinate (protect) your teeth by placing sealants on them. Sealants are equally important for adults and kids since cavities occur lifelong. A big benefit comes from protecting teeth *before* they decay, at about one third the cost of a filling.

See your dentist regularly and do your homework to help make all treats less harmful. What you do can make a major difference in your health and healthcare costs.