

The Mouth Is the Window To Your Health

The oral cavity has often been referred to as the window of our health by health care professionals, as it is the source of many problems we can acquire, is an access point for bad things, and many systemic (whole body) problems can be detected there. Pollutants (such as tobacco products and chemicals), toxins (such as excess vitamins, herbs, pesticides, lead, mercury from fish), and micro-organisms (bacteria, fungus, virus) easily enter our bodies from that point.

Every preventive dental visit should include a head and neck evaluation, oral cancer check, lymph node, and thyroid-size check, and a scan for things, such as melanoma and skin problems, as well as checking the lips, teeth, gums, and intra-oral tissues. I have heard, "Why do you check those things? My doctor checks me periodically?" Dentists are doctors that have specialized in diagnosis and treatment of problems with the chewing apparatus. People typically see their dentist more often than their physician, so dentists must be aware of the signs and symptoms of many medical disorders.

I have heard it asked many times, "Why are you checking for cancer? I don't smoke". About 30,000 new cases of oral cancer are diagnosed each year in the U.S., (400,000 worldwide) and about one fourth are found in people that do not use tobacco products. Oral cancer is the 6th most common type of cancer and affects more people than cervical, ovarian, melanoma, kidney, and brain cancer. It has a very low survival rate if it is diagnosed late.

When looking thoroughly in the mouth dentists can discover many diseases a person can be unaware of. With regular check-ups problems will usually be found in earlier, more easily treatable stages. The dentist can treat it, you can, or a referral can be made to have it treated by another specialist. The problems, conditions, and diseases that can be found in the mouth could fill up these newspaper pages.

Most diseases do not have early warning signs, so people that are not seen regularly often come in when they have pain, or swelling. Pain and/or swelling are late symptoms that typically lead to extensive and expensive treatment that may not be successful. As examples, people can have high blood pressure, cancer, bacterial (hidden abscess), viral (HIV or AIDS), fungal (thrush), or many other systemic diseases for years and not feel they have a problem. Once symptoms or signs show up the problem can be far along.

Being seen regularly for medical and dental check-ups can help keep you comfortable and healthy. Call for your annual physical exam. Set up for the dreaded colonoscopy you have been putting off, see your dentist, get the mole that is changing color or shape and bleeds or itches checked. Be proactive as well as preventive when it comes to your health. We all tend to take good health for granted. Imagine how important good health is for you, and your family. How well do you feel, function, and enjoy life when you are ill or uncomfortable? How well do you work and carry on normal activities? 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'.

Don't forget the importance of your mouth (oral cavity) as it is not just about teeth and gums, but they are very important for speech, nutrition, appearance, comfort, odor control, and taste

satisfaction. It is the window, and doorway, to your health. It should not be like Fibber McGee's closet or a teenager's bedroom. "Clean it out and keep it clean" as parents usually say. It is a healthy suggestion!

Are you due for a good spring cleaning?