



February is National Children's Dental Health Month

Nobody wants to kiss an ugly mouth on February 14th!

by Dr. Brad Edgren

Valentine's Day is fast approaching and what better holiday to illustrate the importance of a healthy mouth. An unseemly mouth including halitosis (bad breath), decayed, stained, and/or missing teeth can ruin that romantic night out.

Appropriate oral care is important to avoid all of these problems. This includes seeing your dentist at least twice a year and proper oral hygiene to reduce the incidence of staining, cavities, halitosis, plaque, and calculus (tartar) buildup.

The whitish film that builds up on teeth between brushing and flossing is called plaque. Plaque contains bacteria and sugars that produce acids that demineralize the surface of the teeth resulting in cavities. Demineralization of the tooth surface or the initiation of dental decay can start to occur after just a few days if the plaque biofilm is not removed. The formation of dental plaque is a normal daily occurrence and hence the need for at least twice daily brushing and flossing. Long standing plaque can actually become chromogenic (color producing) and also harden into calculus (tartar).

Calculus is not removable with normal brushing; its removal requires a professional cleaning by your hygienist and/or dentist.

Avoiding empty calorie foods (foods with added sugars but few or no nutrients) is not only important for your waistline but also for your teeth. Hard and sticky candies, cakes, cookies, and other snack foods, such as chips, are of particular concern because of the types of sugars they contain that quickly adhere to the teeth. The normal bacteria in the mouth feed off of these sugars, creating acids that attack tooth enamel, resulting in decay. Constant drinking of sodas, fruit juices, sweetened coffees, and other sugar filled beverages during the day are also very harmful to teeth because the teeth are bathed in sugar over prolonged periods of time.

Prolonged plaque build-up also leads to gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and periodontal disease



Photo by East West Imaging

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(infection of the bone and tissues that support the teeth). Periodontal disease (periodontitis) is the leading cause of tooth loss in adults. When the supporting tissues around a tooth become infected, bone loss often follows resulting in tooth mobility and possible loss of the involved tooth.

Finally, the accumulation of plaque and food particles is cause of halitosis. Trapped food particles are broken

down by oral bacteria, releasing fowl smelling sulphur based compounds and bad breath. Dehydration, smoking, alcohol, and of course certain foods, also lead to halitosis.

So take care of your pearly whites; keep your mouth smoochable for your Valentine this Feb 14! **G**

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