

# Prevention is Better than Cure



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You have one set of adult teeth to last your lifetime.

Teeth let us chew and enjoy our food; they help us to talk, to pronounce different sounds clearly; and they give our face its shape and create our smiles.

Confidence in our smile affects the way we look and feel, and the way others react to us.

Healthy teeth are a valuable asset. It makes sense to give your teeth the best care possible.

## Healthy teeth and a fresh, confident smile

Statistics show that over two thirds of us are worried that we will have to wear dentures when we are older, but by following a proper oral healthcare routine there is no reason why you shouldn't keep your own teeth for life.

Teeth can be lost through gum disease, tooth decay or trauma.

**Gum disease** is generally painless, which means it often goes unnoticed. When left untreated it causes havoc, with lasting damage and eventually tooth loss. It affects 95% of the British population to various degrees and is the biggest cause of tooth loss.

**Tooth decay** is often the trigger to attend the dentist; it causes holes in our teeth and leads to toothache. Small holes become big holes and small fillings become big fillings until eventually the life of the tooth becomes infected and an abscess forms. The tooth then requires root canal therapy or removal.

Damage to teeth can also be caused by wear and tear, or by accidents.

**It's always better to prevent things from going wrong and Evesham Dental Health Team is pleased to help.**

We aim to provide a preventive approach to dentistry. This means we'll work with you to protect your dental health, regularly reviewing the risks and making prevention of dental problems our priority, intervening only when there is a clear benefit to you.

The better we prevent or deal with dental problems the more we can avoid ongoing traditional drilling, fillings and extractions and the more chance you'll keep your teeth for life. Preventive dentistry aims to address the cause so that problems don't occur or recur and any treatment lasts a long time.



## Preventive dentistry can benefit anyone and it is never too late to start.

At your dental health assessment we'll listen to what concerns you; we'll check every aspect of your dental health and discover together which issues might be putting you at most risk. We'll discuss any recommended treatments to recover your mouth's health and work out a preventive maintenance plan to help you keep it that way. It takes a joint effort between the dental team and yourself – **a partnership to health.**



Nowadays dentists look at more than just your teeth. We review our patients regularly so when changes in **general health** are apparent we can offer guidance. We will ask about **headaches** and other **facial / neck pains**. We routinely check the muscles that move your jaw, plus the jaw joints themselves and will feel for lumps or swellings within the head and neck area.

It is important that everyone, even those who wear dentures have the soft tissues inside and outside the mouth thoroughly **screened for oral cancer** at least once a year. This is especially important if you smoke or chew tobacco and drink alcohol. It is a difficult subject to talk about but fortunately when mouth cancer is spotted early, the chance of a complete cure is good. As caring professionals we want to help reduce your risk. **Regular visits to your dentist could save your life!**

We will carefully assess each tooth and the supporting gum, taking X-rays when necessary to check aspects of your mouth that can't be directly seen. This means we can discover signs of gum disease, tooth decay and tooth wear before you've even noticed any symptoms. You can then stop them from getting worse by adjusting your daily oral healthcare routines, with no need for a dentist to intervene.

## Plaque – the bacterial enemy

**Gum (periodontal) disease** and **tooth decay** are both caused by a thin sticky layer of bacteria called plaque. This is often invisible to the naked eye, but we can show it to you with a phase contrast microscope.

Plaque constantly accumulates on tooth surfaces. Some of the plaque bacteria will release poisons which irritate and destroy the supporting gum and bone (periodontal disease). Other plaque bacteria convert sugars from our food and drinks into acid, which attacks and decays the tooth surface, creating a cavity.

Plaque bacteria can also enter the bloodstream, and so are increasingly being linked to other health problems, especially **heart disease**, making it even more important that you take care of your dental health.

**Bad breath** is common and is often connected to gum disease. Try licking the inside surface of your wrist and sniff – if the smell is unpleasant, you can be pretty sure that your breath is too.

Smelly gases released from the bacteria coating the teeth, gums and tongue is usually the cause of bad breath. Strong smelling foods can add to the problem especially if bits get caught between the teeth and rot. Smoking, a dry mouth and certain illnesses such as nasal and stomach conditions might also be responsible for bad breath.

### **But I have always brushed my teeth twice a day. Why should I be affected?**

Unfortunately our toothbrushes often miss the same areas each time we brush and it will be at these sites that the bacteria hide. It can be very difficult to reach in between teeth and into the tiny surface grooves and ridges. We want to help you discover where the vulnerable areas exist and let you know the most effective products and techniques to reach them.

### **Is failure to remove plaque the only cause of gum disease?**

Yes, and unfortunately some people are particularly vulnerable, needing to achieve virtually perfect cleaning to prevent it. Others seem to have a strong inborn resistance to the bacterial effects and don't experience as much damage even

when their tooth cleaning isn't great. Most people sit between these two extremes. Smoking, stress, diabetes, diminished immunity, hereditary and hormone factors are all known to increase vulnerability to periodontal disease. However if there are no bacteria there can be no destruction.

## Why the hygienist is your smile's best friend

Visiting a hygienist regularly plays a vital role in keeping your teeth and gums healthy, as well as giving you a **fresh smelling and sparkling clean smile**.

While gum disease can cause significant damage to your gums and teeth, the good news is that with good oral healthcare routines, it can usually be slowed down and even stopped. The earlier you gain control the better as the bone supporting your teeth is precious – once lost it's almost impossible to replace. In addition when more destruction has occurred, the more time the disease has been allowed to progress, the more time and effort you'll need to spend to prevent it advancing further. **So don't delay your recovery.**

Our hygienists are fully committed to helping our patients look after their teeth for life. They are highly trained in the very intricate skills required to professionally clean the plaque and tartar off your teeth and are always keen to share their knowledge.

We will work with you to develop your own effective home care techniques to keep your mouth healthy and fresh. In advanced cases of gum disease additional treatments may be required to enable better access for plaque removal.

The huge choice of toothbrushes and toothpastes can be overwhelming, we are happy to recommend the ones that are best suited to your teeth and gums. In most cases, you will be able to buy the appropriate products at our reception, saving you the inconvenience of trying to find them elsewhere and we aim for our prices to be less than the shops.



## Other ways we can help care for your teeth

### Tooth decay

If you frequently get new cavities we will help you identify why they have occurred.

Usually it's related to the sugars within your diet, but surprisingly it's not how much but rather how often you consume sugar that is more critical. Natural and added sugars exist in many foods and drinks – some are obvious and some are hidden.

Frequent intakes of foods or drinks containing sugar will cause recurring bouts of bacterial acid attack. Your saliva plays a vital role in helping to recover a natural balance and repair the tooth mineral loss, but it takes time to do this (about an hour). If you have frequent intakes of sugar, the saliva does not have chance to do its job properly and decay will occur. Similarly food and drinks that are acidic (e.g. fruit juice) will soften the enamel and if these attacks are frequent the tooth surface will wear away – this is called **dental erosion**.

We recommend limiting acidic or sugary food and drinks to main meal times only and chewing sugar free gum or alkali foods (e.g. cheese) after meals to help the saliva restore the natural balance more quickly.

Cleaning your teeth is important to remove plaque and the use of fluoride products will make the enamel more resistant to plaque. Surprisingly its better to brush before a meal rather than after.

The biting surfaces of back teeth are particularly vulnerable to decay. Bacteria and food collect in the tiny crevices, fissures and pits where it is difficult to reach with a toothbrush. Adults who grew up before the preventive era will have had many fillings to mend these surfaces. However, more recently special coating known as **fissure sealant** can be painted and bonded onto vulnerable tooth surfaces reducing their risk of decay – if you would like to know more please ask.



We also recommend treatments to reinforce a tooth rather than letting it break. For example, if a tooth is cracked or weak and in danger of breaking, it may be advisable to place a new filling or perhaps a crown or 'onlay' to protect it. This is always better than waiting until breakage occurs in an uncontrolled way.

### Sensitivity

There are several potential causes of sensitive teeth. Sensitivity can occur due to acid attacks (dental erosion or decay) or by brushing too hard, especially with abrasive toothpastes (abrasion). Clenching and grinding of teeth and receding gums also result in sensitivity.

We can help you find what's causing tooth sensitivity, provide corrective advice, and apply soothing protective products.

### Mouthguards

If you play sport involving physical contact (e.g. rugby and martial arts) or moving objects (e.g. hockey and cricket) we recommend wearing a professional custom made **mouthguard** to prevent damage to your teeth and jaw.

We can take exact impressions of your teeth, creating a mouthguard that fits and protects you properly and is comfortable to wear.

**Snoring and sleep apnoea** might be a big problem for you or your partner. Snoring is usually due to the lower jaw and tongue falling backward during sleep, obstructing the upper airway. An anti-snoring appliance can prevent this and permit you to breathe more easily while sleeping. Stop snoring now, for a fantastic night's sleep for you and your partner.



## Headaches and other bite-related problems

Bite and jaw problems affect one in four people and yet this aspect of preventive dental care is frequently overlooked. If your teeth don't meet together properly, you may have problems not only in your teeth, but also the gums, the temporomandibular jaw joint (TMJ) and the muscles that move your jaw. These problems are called 'occlusal problems' and may include the following:

**Teeth** – Teeth that are out of line, heavily worn or constantly breaking, fillings that fracture or crowns that work loose may all be signs of occlusal problems. Teeth might also be tender to bite on or may ache at certain times of day.

**Gums** - Mobile teeth or receding gums can be made worse by a faulty bite.

**TMJ** - Clicking, grinding or pain in your jaw joints, ringing or buzzing in your ears and difficulty in opening or closing your mouth could all be due to your teeth not meeting together properly.

**Muscles** - If your jaw is in the wrong position, the muscles that move the jaw have to work a lot harder and can get tired. This leads to muscle spasm. The main symptoms are continual headaches or migraine, especially first thing in the morning; pain behind your eyes; sinus pain and pains in your neck and shoulders. Sometimes even the muscles of the back get involved.

Many people have a less than perfect bite and missing teeth, yet will adjust to the problem and not get symptoms until times of increased stress or tension. Occlusal problems are often overlooked because people are not aware that they clench or grind their teeth and so find it hard to link the above symptoms to their bite.

We can offer various solutions to prevent and relieve bite-related symptoms including preventive advice and exercises, occlusal splints, tooth adjustments (equilibration) and when relevant replacement of missing teeth.

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