
FROM THE DESKS OF
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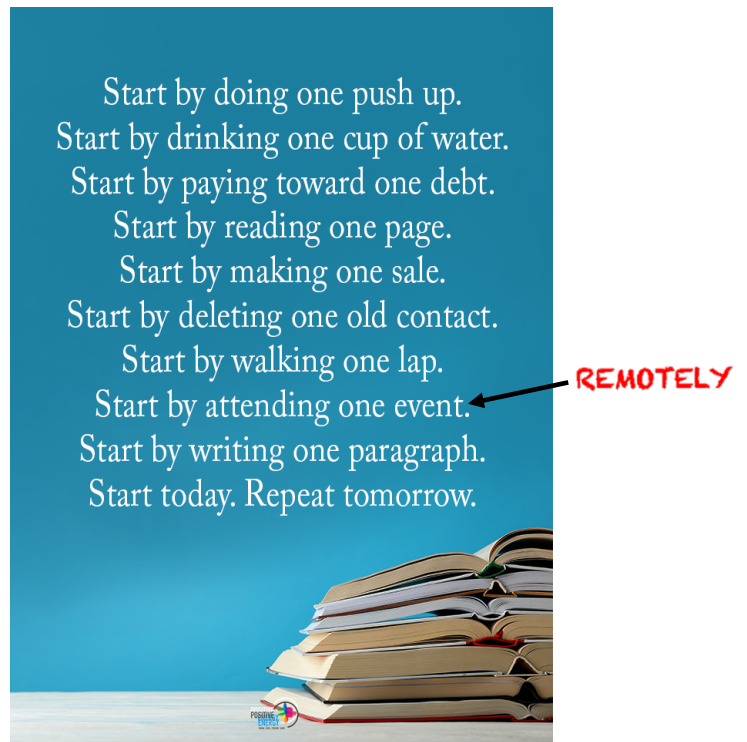
To Our Patients,

I had the loveliest conversation this week with a new couple – a high-ranking college administrator and a dentist. In my cheeky sense of humor that you have all come to know (and maybe love), I promptly announced, “I floss every day!” Why did I say that? One will never truly know. I didn’t announce that I always got straight A’s or that I never turned in a college assignment late. Perhaps, those seemed more predictable.

Fortunately, the encounter gave me an idea for this week’s newsletter. As you know, I like to alternate newsletters between COVID topics and information with other medical topics. Rarely, do we spend enough time talking about oral health as Dave and I often leave that to the experts, our dentists. However, your mouth and teeth are integrally connected to your body and your health. So, I am going to embark in a new direction, and hope to make our patients who are also dentists proud.

Reflections

- Many of us have felt a lack of inertia, while sheltering in place. We are waiting for COVID 19 to end before we embark on the next steps of our lives. Don’t wait. Set some COVID friendly goals and take them one step at a time.
- Don’t forget to take vacations even if you can’t travel! We all need breaks from time to time. A vacation means no work emails, no zoom meetings, no work calls, and if you can completely disconnect from your electronic life.
- Tip of the day seen on a physician wellness blog: Notice what you feel when stressed. A racing heart, fatigue, aches? You can’t alter something you don’t know is going on.



Oral Health and Your Body

Some people are better rules followers than others. Some people are more organized. Some people place more time investing in their health and wellness. These are likely the same folks that brush their teeth multiple times a day and floss daily, rather than the day before their dentist appointment and after the occasional corn on the cob leaves something annoying between their teeth. But, good oral hygiene isn't just important because your dentist says you should do it.

Perhaps you remember Lucy's famous lines, "Ugh, I've been kissed by a dog! I have dog germs!" Her dog Snoopy likely had dog breath and a mouth full of bacteria. What Lucy didn't realize when she requested a kiss from Schroeder without hesitation, was that human's mouths are also full of bacteria.



When people maintain good oral hygiene and are otherwise healthy, their body's immune system keeps their oral bacteria contained and keeps it from wreaking havoc in our bodies. It will likely come as no surprise that if you didn't brush your teeth you would end up with tooth decay leading to cavities and gum diseases like gingivitis and periodontitis. But did you realize that poor oral health can lead to diseases in other parts of your body? And conversely, diseases in your body can lead to worsening oral health.

Risks of Poor Oral Health

- **Bacteremia** – If a patient has a lot of bacteria in their mouth and they develop an abscess or a cut in their mouth, the bacteria can enter into the blood stream. This is called bacteremia. Patient with bacteremia have infection throughout their body and this can lead to a life-threatening condition called sepsis. Bacteremia can also be difficult to treat, requiring weeks of intravenous antibiotics and even surgery, if they attach themselves to the patient's heart valves (endocarditis) or prosthetic joints.
- **Cardiovascular disease** – While the connection is not clearly understood, patients with a lot of inflammation in their mouth from bacteria, are more likely to have heart attacks (myocardial infarctions), clogged arteries (atherosclerosis), and strokes (cerebral vascular accidents).
- **Pregnancy complications** - Periodontitis has been linked to premature birth and low birth weight.
- **Pneumonia** – Bacteria and fungi in your mouth can be inhaled or aspirated into the lungs. Aspiration occurs when people swallow and saliva ends up in their lungs instead of in their esophagus and stomach. This can occur if their muscles are weak or they swallow

incorrectly. Once bacteria or fungi get into the lungs, they can cause a host of problems including pneumonia or bronchiectasis.

- Diabetes – Gum disease, like any infection, doesn't cause diabetes, but it definitely makes it harder to treat. Gum disease raises blood sugar and makes it hard to regulate.
- Asthma and COPD – Gum disease can worsen the inflammation in a patient's lungs, worsening asthma and COPD.

Things that Make Oral Health Worse

- Diabetes – High blood sugars feed bacteria, increasing the number of colonies in your mouth and throat. It also increases your risk of other types of infections including viral and fungal infections. Diabetes also reduces the body's immune system, worsening the frequency and severity of gum disease.
- Osteoporosis – Osteoporosis itself, separate from medication, causes bone loss and it is also linked with periodontal bone loss and tooth loss.
- Dementia – Cognitive decline makes it harder to maintain oral hygiene and patients are more likely to develop oral diseases.
- Cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, pipes, marijuana and alcohol – All of these social activities increase the risk of oral and throat cancers, some through toxins and others through the HPV virus.
- HIV/AIDs – HIV infection impairs the body's immune system increasing the likelihood of infection throughout the body, including the mouth. People with HIV can develop viral ulcers, aphthous ulcers, fungal infections, more severe gum disease and tooth decay.
- Dry mouth – Many disease and medications... and Colorado weather can cause dry mouth. Diseases that decrease saliva include Sjogren's, Rheumatoid arthritis, certain cancers, and treatments include radiation to the head and neck, decongestants, antihistamines, painkillers, diuretics. Without saliva to wash away bacteria and bits of food, and neutralize the acid produced by bacteria, oral disease can worsen.
- Pregnancy – Changes in hormone levels during pregnancy can exaggerate some dental problems such as gum disease and cavities.
- Inhaled steroids – Inhaled steroid medications can lead to oral fungal infections.

Annual physicals and regular eye exams are important. So too are semi-annual dental visits. Take heed when the dentist, gently reminds you to maintain oral hygiene. They will likely tell you to brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft- bristled brush using fluoride toothpaste. Floss daily and rinse your mouth after. Eat a healthy diet and limit food with added sugars. Avoid tobacco, marijuana and limit alcohol. Replace your toothbrush if the bristles start to splay.



Also, be sure your dentist has an updated medication list and knows your health history. With your help, your dentist can help prevent many health complications.

Yes, COVID-19 is still in the air. But don't neglect your health. We continue to see unnecessary complications from delays in care. While some delays have been unavoidable due to the decreased availability of elective procedures, try not to let the cavity turn into a root canal or the root canal turn into a tooth extraction because of delayed care. Get your cleanings and call your dentist if you notice:

- Gums that bleed during brushing and flossing
- Red, swollen, or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- Persistent bad breath
- Pus between your teeth and gums
- Loose or Separating teeth
- A change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- A change in the fit of partial dentures or dentures.

Question for Dave and I:

- 1. You told us who is at risk for severe disease, are there any clues as to who is more likely to have a mild case of COVID-19?**

There was a study published in the journal Nature that was conducted in Germany that provides some clues. The study involved 68 participants who had never been exposed to COVID-19, yet 35% of the people showed some degree of immunity to the virus. The 35% of people had activation of their T-cells within their immune system. The hypothesis is that these folks had been previously exposed to a similar looking viral, though not COVID-19, and therefore, could use that "immune memory" to fight off COVID-19 more quickly. "Immune memory" is a common phenomenon, that is why most people only get the chicken pox, measles or mumps once. Once you have had it, your immune system remembers and can easily prevent it from invading your cells again in the future.

Only one question from the past week. Please feel to keep your comments and questions coming. Comments from our patient who are dentists are also welcome. If I missed anything important, I will gladly add more information on oral health to the next email!

Cheers and keep wearing your mask,

Jeannette and Dave

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