

MIDDLE-AGE TOOTH LOSS IMPLICATIONS

While the incidence of partial/total tooth loss in adults and seniors has decreased since the early 1970s, edentia remains a potential health problem for many adults. Not only does tooth loss hamper a person's ability to derive nutritional benefit from a varied diet, it also detracts from appearance. Moreover, recent research suggests that tooth loss at middle age is linked with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease (independent of such traditional risk factors as high blood pressure, poor diet, and diabetes). According to the study, middle-aged adults who have lost two or more teeth in the recent past could be at increased risk for cardiovascular disease. This is another important reason to replace lost teeth with dentures, bridges, or implants.

P.S. If left untreated, the gap(s) left by lost teeth will be filled with adjacent teeth that drift out of position, creating bite problems that may further compromise chewing.

PLANE FACTS

To prevent the mild form of gum disease known as "gingivitis," patients should be diligent about brushing and flossing at home and scheduling professional cleanings that can effectively remove the sticky film of bacteria-laden "plaque" that can cause inflammation. As gums become inflamed, they pull away from teeth to form pockets. Plaque that then becomes trapped in these pockets cannot be removed with regular brushing. Instead, the accumulated plaque hardens into "tartar," which can only be removed with "scaling and root planing." This deep-cleaning procedure involves the use of a sharp, hook-shaped instrument that scrapes away plaque and tartar from the sides of each tooth, all the way down below the gum line to the bottom of the pockets.

P.S. According to a July 2015 study in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*, scaling and root planing are beneficial to patients with chronic periodontitis, which affects 47.2% of adults over age 30 in the United States.

TREATING A TOOTHACHE AT HOME

If a toothache lasts more than one to two days, it is important to schedule an appointment with the dentist. If left untreated, the abscess, tooth decay, cracked tooth, or lost filling that prompted the pain is likely to pose even greater problems (infection and worse pain). In the meantime, over-the-counter pain medications such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen may be used to reduce the pain and discomfort while waiting to see the dentist. There are also over-the-counter dental gels available that contain local anesthetics that numb pain. This treatment, however, is not suitable for children under the age of 12. In addition, while clove oil is an age-old treatment for toothaches, there is insufficient evidence to recommend its use.

P.S. Consuming clove oil can be dangerous for children and pregnant women.

WATCHING WHAT YOU EAT

As everyone knows, it is important to minimize consumption of sugary and processed foods in order to avoid tooth decay and unnecessary weight gain. To these ends, many people adhere to diets that impose portion control, calorie counting, keeping food journals, and other means of tracking food consumption. Unfortunately, these methods are often misleading since faulty memory, inaccurate measurements, and simple errors make tracking diets a fairly unreliable exercise. In an effort to track dietary data more reliably, scientists have developed a tiny, wireless sensor that can be attached to a tooth that can collect real-time information about a person's consumption of salt, glucose, and alcohol. This innovation may be a game-changer for collecting data on food intake.

P.S. The tooth-mounted food sensor mentioned above is 2 millimeters square and can flexibly conform and bond to tooth surfaces. It may someday be programmed to sound alarms when sugar, salt, or other compounds are detected.