

CANCER SCREENING

During comprehensive twice-a-year dental checkups, the dentist and hygienist not only perform a professional cleaning and health assessment of the patient's teeth and gums, but they also screen for signs of oral cancer. Also known as "mouth cancer," these types of cancers include cancers of the lips, tongue, cheeks, floor of the mouth, hard and soft palate, sinuses, and pharynx (throat). If not diagnosed and treated early, these cancers can be life-threatening. Because oral cancer rarely causes pain in its early stages, it is usually only detected by dental professionals, who can spot abnormal cell growth that looks like flat patches. A sore in the mouth that does not heal is the most common symptom of oral cancer.

P.S. Some oral cancers are not detected until they produce symptoms similar to those of a toothache.

MATERIAL DIFFERENCES IN IMPLANTS

While titanium has been the traditional material of choice for dental implants, patients also have the option of a non-metal tooth-root replacement. Like its titanium counterpart, a "zirconia" dental implant is biocompatible, enabling it to be embedded in the jawbone, with which it bonds directly through a process known as "osseointegration." Unlike a titanium dental implant, which consists of the implant and the "abutment" (to which the prosthetic tooth is attached), a zirconia dental implant is of one piece (combining the implant and the abutment). Zirconia itself is a crystal material that is best known for its likeness to diamond. While both implant materials are biocompatible, FDA approved, and considered safe, zirconia is for those who prefer a non-metal material.

P.S. Because a titanium dental implant comes in two pieces, it allows for more control over a few elements of the entire tooth-replacement process than a one-piece zirconia implant does.

GUARD AGAINST FACIAL INJURY

Along with sports eyewear, helmets, and face masks, the American Dental Association strongly advises athletes to wear mouth guards that protect against facial injuries. At the very least, the “boil and bite” mouth guards available at pharmacies, which are made out of thermo-plastic resins that can be shaped by the tongue and fingers, offer some degree of protection. Stock “fitted” mouth guards are ready-made mouth protectors available at sports stores. Because they cannot be adjusted, wearers may experience breathing difficulties that discourage their use. Finally, the dentist can provide custom-fitted mouth guards that are fitted to the wearer’s unique dental anatomy. These high-quality devices offer superior fit and comfort, based on thickness, height, and other wearer preferences.

P.S. While mouth guards are typically worn over the upper teeth, if you wear a fixed dental appliance on your lower jaw, the dentist can make a mouth guard for the lower teeth as well.

POOR ORAL HEALTH LINKED TO FRAILITY

It has long been established that healthy gums and strong teeth go a long way toward preserving well-being. Recently, this association was clearly demonstrated by a study that found that tooth loss, gum disease, tooth decay, and dry mouth may be linked with increased risks of frailty in older adults, especially men. “Frailty” is a medical term used to describe becoming weak and more vulnerable to declining health or the inability to perform daily activities. It is often assessed based on having at least three of the following symptoms: exhaustion, weak grip strength, slow walking speed, weight loss, or low levels of physical activity. Good oral health ensures the ability to adhere to a nutritious diet, which builds strength.

P.S. If you find it difficult to bite into an apple, schedule an appointment with the dentist for a dental evaluation.