



## **Your Dental Health**

### **Dental needs in economic hard times**

**by Dr. Stephen Durham**

The state of the economy seems to be on everyone's mind right now. No matter what business or part of the country that you are in, it has affected almost all of us in some way. People are having to cut back spending on things they deem are not a priority. Unfortunately, the latest reports show dentistry has been one of the areas people have chosen to cut from their budgets.

Some patients are holding off from getting the necessary dental work done to keep them in good health. Putting this important work off, can be a very expensive decision that will ultimately cost the patient more money and require more involved procedures.

If the eyes are the window to the soul, then the mouth is the entry port to the rest of your body. Several medical conditions have been found to have relationships or links to gum disease. Some of these include heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, lung problems, rheumatoid arthritis, and not to mention a shorter average life span.

Each year, many people are hospitalized due to dental infections, with some infections even leading to death. Those with a family history of dental problems, autoimmune disorders, diabetes, heart disease and smoking are at the highest risk. Although gum disease and abscessed teeth do not affect everyone equally, everyone is still at risk.

Gum disease is an insidious, slowly progressing disease that can destroy bone around teeth without any pain. It is estimated that up to 80% of the adult US population has some form of it, and many of those are completely unaware of the situation. It is caused by the build up that accumulates on teeth that are not brushed and flossed properly every day. Signs of the disease are tender, bleeding or swollen gums.

As the disease state advances, bone around the teeth continues to be lost, causing teeth to become loose. By the time that a person realizes that their teeth are loose, it

could be too late to save the teeth. The further the disease state has progressed, the more invasive the procedures have to be to control it.

Regular checkups and cleanings help identify problem areas between teeth and gums called periodontal pockets. Normally, pockets greater than 3 millimeters represent some level of bone loss. The earlier it is caught, the easier it is to treat and keep the gums healthy.

Many people believe that cavities are something that only children deal with. Nothing could be further from the truth. Due to busy life styles and the availability of high amounts of fermentable carbohydrates in our diets and acidic soft drinks, tooth decay is very common problem. It is estimated that 96% of employed adults and 99.5% of people older than 65 have experienced dental decay.

Like gum disease, cavities do not normally cause any pain until extensive damage is done. Pain from a cavity will normally occur when the pulp tissue (nerve) becomes inflamed and irritated. Sometimes the pulp may die and necrose without pain, leading to an abscess. As with gum disease, an abscessing tooth is the body's way of destroying bone around the teeth. This helps the body get rid of each source of infection. In most instances, these teeth can still be saved, but again, more invasive procedures are needed to do so.

The key to preventing mouth pain is to establish a regular oral hygiene routine and stick to it. This includes brushing and flossing teeth every day after meals. This also includes having your teeth cleaned and checked at least twice a year, every six months. The earlier dental problems are caught, the easier the corrective solution will be. This means smaller dental bills in the future.

When you consider that we all want to eat, talk, smile and laugh at all times with confidence and without embarrassment, our teeth are extremely important. When you also consider that those without teeth live an average of ten years less than those with teeth, it emphasizes the importance of your dental health.

If it is fear or embarrassment that keeps you away from regular dental visits, then communication and advanced technology are your keys to getting started. Find a nice dentist who understands you and your situation. The dentist can then work with you to get you healthy.

Remember, the earlier the problems are caught, the less money required to be spent to keep them healthy. Now that will make anyone Smile!

*Dr. Stephen Durham offers a variety of dental services including sedation dentistry, PerioLase for scalpel-free gum surgery, smile makeovers in as little as two visits and natural-looking implants for missing teeth. For more information call 843-379-5400 or visit the website at [www.DurhamDental.net](http://www.DurhamDental.net).*