

PLAZA HEALTH DENTISTRY

Conservative Care of Tooth Decay

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If your home is at all like mine, residual candy bars are only now becoming scarcer.

Therefore, after the Halloween-fest, when better a time to talk tooth decay? The common decay process begins with carbohydrate remnants (read: candy or "Lays" chips) left in the pits and fissures of tooth surfaces. Enter bugs into the picture; or, more accurately, onto the tooth. Count oral bacteria as yet another that can't eat just one.

Unfortunately, what goes in must go out. Waste product is rudely deposited on the tooth surface as acid. This acid, with its low pH, attacks the tooth surface and de-mineralizes the calcium-rich, super hard enamel layer – transforming it into a soft, gelatinous material that dentists refer to as a carious lesion. Most everybody else knows it as a cavity.

Understanding the decay process, one can see how it is actually an infection (and yes, it can be spread). Appropriately, dentistry's basic prevention answer has been to stress home-care (brush, floss). After that, however, is the problem. *Sadly, most dental offices don't even recognize decay as an infection; much less treat it that way.* The crude, surgical resection (read: drill) of precious tooth structure is, *still today*, the treatment of choice.

Minimally-Invasive, conservative practicing dentists place greater emphasis on risk analysis, prevention and very early treatment of the infection. A State-of-the-Art in-office assessment of cavity-risk is available in certain dental offices today. It is called CAMBRA.

For those at higher risk, without actual cavities, prevention methods can be emphasized. At-home and in-office modalities include cavity varnishes, topical and liquid fluoride applications. Certain types of Sugar-free gum may show beneficial effects for these patients. Prescribed at-home treatments are aimed at lowering the oral pH (acid neutralizing) and/or reducing the harmful bacteria.

For those with early, smaller sized cavities... minimally-invasive clinical management now includes "freezing" the progression of decay. This new-age product is called ICON and it actually fills, reinforces and stabilizes the affected tooth structure without drilling or sacrificing healthy tooth structure. Other minimally invasive techniques geared toward cavity control are preventive restorations called PRR's and sealants. Another drilling alternative is laser treatment.

Today, prevention and early treatment of cavities is highly successful. It's important to note that a healthy (un-drilled) tooth is stronger and, importantly, will lead to less costly, less invasive dentistry in adulthood.

This subject is further discussed on my website. Please feel free to visit.

Smile.... Many folks are saying "Drilling... No Thanks!"

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