



Tooth Talk

“Hey Doc, I brush everyday. Why am I still getting cavities?” (Part 1)

Cavities are areas of decay caused by certain oral bacteria. When the cavities get deeper, the bacteria eventually penetrates through the enamel (the outer protective layer) and gets into the dentin and the pulp which are the living portions of the tooth. At that time, professional dental help is necessary to stop the progression of the disease and the pain/discomfort associated with the cavities. Many people brush daily and do not have a high sugar diet and yet they still develop cavities. Why is that the case?

Let's examine some of the risk factors associated with tooth decay:

- Dental Hygiene- Brushing alone is not enough to keep the teeth clean. 30% of the tooth surfaces lies in the areas in-between the teeth. Therefore, people need to floss regularly. Just brushing alone cannot prevent cavities from starting in-between the teeth.
- Dry mouth- Saliva washes plaque, which contains cavity-causing bacteria, away from the teeth. It also has minerals that a) neutralize acids that dissolves enamel and b) rebuild enamel. Most medications, chemotherapy, and some diseases (especially certain auto-immune diseases such as Sjogren's syndrome) can lead to dry mouth. Drinking ample amount of water daily and using fluoridated mouth rinses can help fight the side effects of dry mouth.
- Tooth anatomy- Teeth with deep pits and grooves are more prone to getting cavities as food and bacteria can hide in the pits and grooves and they become more difficult to remove. Therefore, people born with teeth that have deep pits and grooves should take extra care with their oral hygiene routine in order to prevent tooth decay. It is genetics that determines the anatomy of one's teeth. Placing dental sealants, a protective coating applied over the chewing surfaces of the teeth in order to seal off the deep pits and grooves, can help reduce the incidence of developing cavities.

In the next months article, I shall continue to discuss the possible reasons why some people are more prone to dental decay.

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