

Keeping you smiling

Dr Mark-Steven Howe answers some of our dentistry queries

At what age do I need to introduce my children to a dentist?

I would recommend from as early an age as possible. Initially this gets the children used to the idea that going to the dentist is a safe and familiar place. Secondly, it helps us spot problems and undertake getting preventative health care before problems get out of hand. Also, it's worth noting that pure apple juice is as bad for young children's teeth as fizzy drinks.

Can flossing too much damage your gums?

Doing too much of anything can do damage; flossing once a day round healthy teeth and gums will be fine. The only time you may need to do more is if there is a specific food packing problem, usually between the back teeth.

What can I do to prevent receding gums from getting worse?

I would recommend a regular dental check and hygiene appointment, at least once a year, and thorough but gentle tooth brushing. Finally, smoking is a major factor in accelerating gum recession, so seek some help with giving up if you do smoke.

My teeth have become progressively more sensitive as I've got older. What should I do?

Have you had your teeth checked by a dentist recently? If there are no major problems then use a desensitising toothpaste all the time, even when the sensitivity appears under control, and don't rinse out your mouth with water for at least half an hour after brushing. Then apply a little bit of the toothpaste to the trouble spot after brushing.

What would you recommend as a course of treatment for an adult needing their teeth straightening?

Speak to your dentist about a referral to an orthodontist. There are lots of options for adult orthodontics nowadays.

One of my upper premolars needs to be extracted. Should I go for an implant or bridge work?



That depends. If the teeth either side are perfect then a resin-retained bridge or implant are your best bets. If the teeth either side are heavily repaired then a bridge might be best. If in doubt, get a second opinion.

What is the biggest misconception surrounding cosmetic dentistry?

Generally the benefits are emphasised such as a whiter more even smile and the risks ignored such as permanent tooth damage and expensive repair and maintenance. Problems usually arise only after a few years and are difficult to remedy.

Should teeth be white?

Teeth are naturally slightly yellow rather than white. For a youthful, natural smile be careful not to over-whiten your teeth as it can sometimes look too much and be hard

to correct, unless that's the effect you want.

Would you recommend teeth-whitening products available on the high street or is it something I should consult my dentist about?

Tooth whitening works with all the kits and systems available, but research has shown that the best results come from dentist-prescribed overnight-whitening by a factor of two, compared to over-the-counter whitening products, after 10 weeks post-treatment. ■



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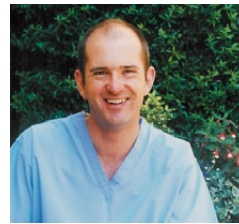
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PROMOTIONAL FEATURE



Give your teeth a treat

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In my surgery I have a copy of a graph produced by Forbes magazine detailing health care expenditure against age in the US. Its easy enough to find on the internet if you want to have a look. In essence what it shows is that up to the age of 50 our health care costs are minimal and you might be hard pressed to even know who your doctor or dentist is, only attending when there is a problem. What is startling is how the graph suddenly starts rising after the 50 year point. Is it a global conspiracy that all the doctors and dentists have started picking on the 50+ age group? Well maybe but it is more likely that those crowns, fillings and veneers that you have been collecting over time have now been in constant use for 20-30 years and are starting to wear out coupled with some degree of gum recession opening up space between our teeth which we never had before.

What can we do about this? Well there are two choices. The first is to pretend it's not happening but put your dentist's number on speed-dial and hope their weekend emergency service is good.

The second is to change the way we approach our healthcare and move to a more preventative attitude. At the annual meeting of the British Society of Prosthodontics in Newcastle we were discussing when was the best time to have a crown or filling replaced. The conclusion was 'just before you need to'. Now this might seem like daft advice but once you have got toothache or broken a large filling your dental bills can rapidly go from expensive to very expensive.

So what's the message? Give your teeth a treat and keep your gums healthy, make an appointment to fix those broken or discoloured fillings and sensitive teeth before your teeth make an appointment for you. Invest in your dental health early and it will save you a lot of money and grief in the long-term.



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