

# Preventive Care is the Best Dental Option

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When economic times get tough, people often experience more stress and focus on things that seem the most urgent. Many adopt a “wait until things happen” philosophy instead of taking steps to head off or prevent future problems.

While this approach may work for some things in life, it’s not a good decision when it relates to health issues such as preventive dental care.

People may mistakenly assume the “no pain, no problem,” attitude about their oral health. If they don’t feel any pain, everything must be OK. However, preventive dental care is an investment in the future, since many tooth and other health issues may be detected in the early stages. It is also usually cheaper to pay for preventive care than expensive tooth repairs, medical tests, surgery, or other healthcare treatments.

Researchers have recently identified several reasons why preventive dental care is the wisest choice for oral health:

**Oral Health Issues in Children.** Millions of children are at risk for experiencing oral health problems. Children lose more than 51 million school hours each year due to dental-related illness. According to The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, tooth decay is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases – five times more common than asthma and seven times more frequent than hay fever.

**Changing Dental Health Needs for Boomers.** America’s Baby Boomer generation will total more than 96 million by 2010. As Boomers age, their risks increase for medical concerns such as type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and heart disease. The Academy for General Dentistry reports that dentists detect early symptoms of these issues during routine checkups:

- Bad breath, dry mouth, and bleeding gums are often indicators of diabetes. Diabetics are more susceptible to developing oral infections and gum disease, and these conditions are often more severe in diabetic patients.
- Dentists can detect the first stages of bone loss on x-rays, and identify early warning signs of osteoporosis from advancing gum disease and loose or ill-fitting dentures.
- Sore and painful jaws may be early warning signs of heart disease or attack.

**Caring for Teeth May Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease.** Brushing and flossing your teeth may lessen your chances of experiencing heart disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death worldwide. The Society for General Microbiology reports many people with this condition do not have any of the concerns traditionally linked with the illness,

such as smoking, obesity, or high cholesterol. However, they discovered a link with individuals who had gum disease and heart disease. Now there are more than 50 studies linking gum disease with heart disease and strokes.

People with poor dental hygiene and those who do not brush their teeth regularly may end up with bleeding gums, a symptom of gum disease. There are more than 700 different types of bacteria found in the mouth. When the bacteria gets into an open blood vessel from bleeding gums, they cling to platelets inside the blood and may eventually cause a partial blockage in the blood flowing to the heart and result in a heart attack.

**Oral Health Needs are Different for Men and Women.** Women's oral health needs change at different stages throughout their lives, including puberty, pregnancy, and menopause. These life changes often result in changes in women's hormone levels, which may affect their oral health.

According to the Academy of General Dentistry, men are less likely to regularly brush their teeth or seek preventive dental care. They often ignore their oral health, scheduling a dental visit only when problems arise. Men develop oral and throat cancer and gum disease twice as often as women do, primarily from the use of tobacco products.

#### **Producers Reinforce Preventive Care**

Producers have an excellent opportunity to underscore their value as a broker by communicating the importance of dental insurance benefits with employers. Workers who maintain good oral health for themselves and their families tend to be more productive at work, because their focus is not on medical concerns or oral pain and discomfort.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, dental insurance can influence employees' use of dental care options. Nationwide, only 46 percent of employees have access to dental care through their employers' benefit programs. Approximately 80 percent of workers will participate in benefit programs if dental care is included in their benefits package.

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