

DENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted all our lives and this period can be very stressful. We have all been forced to remain at home changing our whole lifestyle, which includes missing routine health check-up. Therefore the priority would be to take care of one's health at any cost. While we safeguard our general health, there is a tendency to neglect some specific areas such as dental health. With most of the dental offices/clinics remaining closed (for normal dental procedures) across the country during this lockdown, it may not be possible to visit the dentist for routine check up or cleaning. Therefore it is extremely important to keep up with dental homecare.

INTRODUCTION

Here are some common tips to maintain good oral health while staying at home :-

- Brush and floss twice a day, preferably with a fluoridated toothpaste.
- Rinse the mouth well after every meal (Use a mouth wash if needed or Gargling with warm salt water is also good).
- Eat a well balanced healthy diet and drink a lot of water.
- Avoid smoking.

While it is always better to call up and consult the dentist regarding a dental problem, there are a few home remedies that can be done to treat or control the problem temporarily and in cases where a dentist cannot be reached immediately :

TOOTHACHE

It's important to figure out what's the cause of discomfort/pain. In any case, a regular salt water

rinse can help for minor irritation. Salt water is a natural disinfectant, and it can help loosen food particles and debris that may be stuck in between the

teeth. Treating a toothache with this can also help reduce inflammation and heal any oral wounds. But for a toothache due to a cavity, the age-old remedy of clove oil is still a very effective way of controlling the pain although temporarily. A drop or two can be added to a small ball of cotton and placed into the painful cavity. If symptoms persist for more than a day or two, or if there is a swelling, then antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medication may have to be prescribed by a dentist.

MOUTH SORE/ ULCER/ IRRITATION

- Application of an oral ointment containing a local anaesthetic in the
- affected area 15 minutes before every meal is advised.
- 2% Povidone Iodine (Betadine) mouth rinse can also be used with
- equal parts of water to reduce inflammation or soreness of mouth
- or throat. It is known to be effective in killing bacteria and viruses,
- although studies are yet to confirm its effect on the corona virus.
- It is also good to take multivitamins or B-complex

- tablets once a
- day after food.
 - Dislodgement of a cap or bridge :-
 - It is important to keep the crown or bridge safely aside in a
 - container, until the next dental appointment, instead of trying to fix
 - it back and resulting in a broken crown or broken tooth!

ACCIDENT/TRAUMA TO TOOTH GUMS:-

- First of all, it is important to not panic and remain calm. If there is bleeding, pressure should be applied in the area with clean cotton
- dipped in cold water preferably. An ice pack can also be applied. If there is persistent bleeding, a call to consult the dentist is a must.
- For other dental emergencies, it is better to call up the dentist and visit him.

THE FOLLOWING ARE TERMED “EMERGENCIES” WHERE A VISIT TO THE DENTIST IS REQUIRED :-

1. Tooth pain with swelling (which does not subside after antibiotic treatment).
2. Trauma or fracture of tooth due to an accident.
3. Severe consistent bleeding of gums
4. Swelling or pain around gums, face or neck.
5. Denture adjustment or tooth pain for people receiving radiation or other cancer treatment.
6. Snipping or adjustment of wires of braces that hurts the cheek or gums.
7. Post surgical swelling, pain or stitch removal.

Other than these emergencies, it may be better to postpone certain dental procedures until the lockdown is lifted. It is important to know that dental offices are more prone to spread of the corona virus than any other clinical setting. The corona virus that causes

covid-19 spreads through respiratory droplets. These droplets circulate in the air as aerosols when you cough or sneeze. If someone breathes this in, they can get the viral infection. It is also present in the mucous and the saliva present in the mouth and throat which are the fluids the dentist and his instruments easily come in contact with. The risk of

covid-19 infection due to the procedures which involve face to face communication with patients and frequent exposure to saliva, blood and handling of instruments that produce a lot of aerosols or droplets of water in the air (water spraying instruments) which can carry the virus throughout the entire office.

In general, dentists and their staff are at a great risk of contracting the viral infection if proper precautions and PPE personal protection equipments are not used. Therefore it is absolutely imperative, (in case of emergencies) to always make a call or have an online consultation with the dentist, before visiting the dental clinic, to give him time to make the necessary arrangements before arriving at the clinic for the procedure.

DENTAL PROCEDURES THAT CAN BE POSTPONED AND ARE NOT CONSIDERED AS EMERGENCIES ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1. Regular visits for examination, scaling or teeth whitening.
2. Regular visits for braces.
3. Removal of teeth that aren't painful.
4. Treatment of cavities that aren't painful.
5. X-rays.
6. Cosmetic treatment.

Again, it is always wise to call up the dentist first before visiting him or have an online consultation even, so he can be prepared before any emergency treatment. But, with the lockdown and the number of cases increasing steadily especially in India, it is advisable to postpone all regular dental treatment and take care of one's dental health at home and stay safe!