

THE LINK



The Link is a monthly newsletter published by Delta Dental of New Mexico about the role of dental insurance, and the link between oral health and overall health. Since it includes oral health news, industry news, and Delta Dental updates, it's also our link to you.

Saving Teeth, One Root Canal at a Time

Dispelling common myths about root canals

Root canals have long suffered from a bad reputation — one that is a bit unfair. The procedure is actually an important tool dentists use to save teeth that otherwise could be lost or severely infected.

“People who have experienced the procedure will tell you that it’s not so bad, especially when you consider the alternative,” says Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Once you understand what to expect and some of the common misconceptions about root canal therapy, there is really little need for anxiety.”

Dr. Anderson identified a few of the most common misunderstandings about root canals.

Myth 1: Root canals are painful and lengthy procedures.

Advances in techniques and equipment have made root canals quicker, easier, and less uncomfortable than ever before. In many cases, the procedure is completed during a single office visit.

Myth 2: Root canals remove the roots of the teeth.

Under the hard enamel of the tooth lie nerves and tissue, also called pulp. An existing cavity or trauma to the tooth can create a pathway for bacteria to pass through the tooth and reach the pulp. The resulting infection can become very painful and harmful to the health of the tooth. A root canal procedure involves removing the nerve and pulp of the tooth, cleaning the inside of the tooth, and sealing it to prevent the reentry of bacteria and further decay and infection.

Myth 3: If you need a root canal, you’ll know it.

There are some common symptoms that can point to the need for a root canal. A severe toothache, swelling or small sores on your gums, prolonged sensitivity to hot and cold, or a darkened tooth, can all indicate an infection in the tooth. In some cases, however, there are no symptoms present. It is important to see your dentist for routine exams and cleanings so he or she can regularly assess the state of your oral health.

“If you experience any pain, swelling or other changes in your mouth, it’s important to see your dentist right away so he or she can determine the problem and prescribe the best course of treatment,” said Dr. Anderson. “Only your dentist knows for sure when a root canal may be required to save a tooth.”

Group Plan Administration Tip of the Month

Delta Dental of New Mexico offers a variety of payroll stuffers designed to help Group Plan Administrators promote good oral health habits. Payroll stuffers are a great way to help educate employees on issues of dental health, which affects overall health.

The payroll stuffers, which can also be posted in break rooms, common areas, or distributed during benefit meetings, are all available to download and print at deltadentalnm.com.

To access, visit the “Employers” section of the website and click on the Oral Health Information link. Scroll down to find a selection of the different topics from which to choose.

Diet and Your Oral Health



Your body is like a complex machine. The foods you choose as fuel, and how often you “fill up”, affect your general health and that of your teeth and gums. Many dentists are concerned that their patients are consuming record numbers of sugar-filled sodas, sweetened fruit drinks, and non-nutritious snacks. These items generally have little if any nutritional value and over time they can take a toll on teeth.

Eating patterns and food choices among children and teens are important factors that affect how quickly youngsters may develop tooth decay.

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Teeth Talk

Prophylaxis - routine cleaning
Periodontal scaling and root planing - deep cleaning involving the roots of the teeth
Periodontal maintenance - cleaning following therapy for active periodontal disease

SGP RATES UPDATES for 1/1/09

The 2009 Small Group Pool (SGP) Broker Resource Guide is available to all appointed Brokers. All 2009 SGP rates have been approved by the Department of Insurance. If you haven't already done so, please call us today for your copy 505-998-7555.

Claims Tip of the Month

A **route prophylaxis (cleaning)** consists of the removal of plaque, calculus, and stains from the tooth structure.

Periodontal maintenance (or periodontal cleaning) is a more extensive removal of bacterial plaque and calculus in patients who have had periodontal therapy. Periodontal maintenance sometimes involves site specific **periodontal scaling and root planing** which removes plaque and calculus from exposed *tooth* and *root* surfaces above and below the gum line.

If a claim for "stand alone" periodontal scaling and root planing is received for the same date of service as periodontal maintenance, the stand alone periodontal scaling and root planing is disallowed as part of the periodontal maintenance service.

Most Delta Dental of New Mexico plans provide benefits for two cleanings (two routine or two periodontal, or one of each) per year and cover *both* types of cleanings at 100% with no deductible. Some plans, however, make coverage distinctions between the two types of cleanings. To determine whether Periodontal cleanings are subject to a deductible and/or the coverage level applicable in your plan, refer to your Summary of Benefits or call Benefit Services for assistance.

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When bacteria (plaque) come into contact with sugar in the mouth, acid is produced. This acid can attack the teeth for 20 minutes or more and result in tooth decay.

Foods that contain sugars of any kind can contribute to tooth decay. Almost all foods, including milk and vegetables, have some type of sugar. Those foods, however, shouldn't be removed from our diets because they contain important nutrients. To help control the amount of sugar you consume, read food labels and choose foods and beverages that are low in added sugars. Added sugars often are present in soft drinks, candy, cookies and pastries.

If your diet lacks certain nutrients, it may be more difficult for tissues in your mouth to resist infection. This may contribute to periodontal (gum) disease, a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Although poor nutrition does not cause periodontal disease directly, many researchers believe that the disease progresses faster and could be more severe in people with nutrient-poor diets.

What can you do?

- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Limit the number of between-meal snacks. When you snack, choose nutritious foods that are low in sugar.
- Brush thoroughly twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss or use another kind of interdental cleaner daily to remove plaque from under the gums and between teeth.
- Schedule regular dental visits for checkups and cleanings.

To increase awareness of diet habits, you might also try keeping a food diary for a week. Record every item you eat and drink, including hard candies or chewing gum that contains sugar.

Source: www.ADA.org

Community Benefit

For the third year in a row, Delta Dental is helping to support the Van Buren Dental Clinic, sponsored by the Division of Dental Hygiene at the University of New Mexico. The clinic is a preventive dental hygiene program at Van Buren Middle School in Albuquerque that provides dental care and dental health instruction to children who would otherwise have no access to a dentist. Dental hygiene students from the university gain hands-on experience by providing services to these students. For the 2007-2008 school year, 227 children in grades 6th-8th were enrolled in the Van Buren Middle School Dental Clinic. This year's donation from Delta Dental was \$24,000.



Walt Bolic presents a check to Christine Nathe of the Van Buren Dental Clinic.

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