

By Steff Sanchez, 19/08/2009 07:05

Making dental phobia a thing of the past

The mere thought of a visit to the dentist evokes fear in many of us. This vision, however, is outdated. We spoke to one dentist about why Britons should have nothing to fear.



Image (c

We Brits still hate going to the dentist. In fact, a new survey suggests that 8% of Britons never visit their dental surgeries. Avoiding trips to the dentist is like avoiding the GP. Regular check-ups are necessary to ensure that the teeth and gums stay healthy. By maintaining regular visits, a patient can avoid painful procedures down the road when a problem grows out of hand.

Dr Omar Qureshi, a dentist with surgeries in Cambridge and London (www.smilelondon.co.uk), says: "The government has tried to bring out people to say you only need to go once in a year, but that's up in the air. The standard is a visit every six months."

Dr Qureshi feels that less than half, "around 40%", of the UK actually visits the dentist as frequently as they should. One major factor, he says, is fear. "Since some people don't go [to the dentist] regularly, their experience may only be as a child. If they are a certain age, their childhood experience would have been from the 1970s, possibly

1960s. Dentistry was very different then from what it is now."

Pain-free dentistry

Modern technology means that going to the dentist is now virtually painless. New techniques allow traditional procedures, such as injections or being kept asleep under anaesthesia, to be put aside. Ultra-modern dental offices use lasers - for more than one reason.

"These days [a surgery] doesn't have to use needles, because even that has changed. No shot, whatsoever. The laser will take out the pain-receiving nerve endings. Then, you can actually cut it without needing to give a shot. Yes, there are still drills, but there doesn't have to be. You can also use a laser to cut."

Oral health for seniors

Dr. Qureshi feels that price is another obstacle that blocks many people from visiting their dentist. "Price seems to come before people's health. People do not put teeth as high on their list—it's changing, but historically they haven't done that," he says.

Although not free, NHS dentists can provide dental care cheaper than private doctors. However, employing an NHS dentist may be problematic. For one, they are difficult to find. The vast majority of dentists are private. Moreover, the government set prices, although convenient for patients, may actually hinder care.

"There is no incentive to improve the level of care [under the NHS]. Dentists are going to get one fee. Someone who is experienced, maybe with 30 years experience, earns the same amount as someone who's just out of college. It doesn't seem particularly fair to me."

Get what you pay for

With dentistry, people get what they pay for. While a private dentist may be more expensive, a patient will also be purchasing better care - both with the office equipment and doctor's qualifications. Still, the best way to find a suitable dentist is to listen to a friend. Often, a positive review based on real experience is the best way to locate a doctor.

"Just because someone's in every association, doesn't mean they're qualified. You can't go on price, either. They have to come from word of mouth. It's really the level of care you get from the minute you walk in the door," says Dr Qureshi.

What is plaque

Regular visits to the dentist should be a priority for everyone in the United Kingdom, as serious complications can arise from a poor dental regime.

Dr Qureshi continues: "Obviously, you need to keep your teeth so you can function and eat. Still, there are some less obvious health reasons. People with marked amounts of gum disease do actually have slightly higher risks of heart disease. There are studies that show that those two things are linked."

If health complications are not inspiration enough to schedule a visit, there are some less obvious reasons for regular dental appointments.

"How does somebody smile? How does that figure on an employer giving someone the job?" asks Dr. Qureshi. "Apparently, it's quite high. People do equate a nice smile with success."

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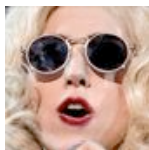
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