

New Year's Resolutions

Many people start off the New Year with a promise to become healthy by eating right, losing weight, and quitting smoking or to save money. Another way to start the year right is by taking care of your dental health. Taking care of your dental needs will help you to stay healthy and by seeing your dentist for regular checkups and maintaining your teeth you can prevent more drastic and expensive treatment which in the long run saves you money. The following are some New Year's resolutions which can lead to a healthier mouth and help you save money.

Make a resolution to get your cavities filled. When caries has been detected it is more inexpensive to have the tooth restored to prevent the caries from getting larger, which could lead to more extensive and expensive treatments, and not treating cavities can lead to infecting other teeth with caries as well.

Make a resolution to drink less pop. Pop contains acid. Even sugar free pop contains acid. This acid attacks your teeth and causes demineralization which weakens your teeth and makes them porous and provided a place for cariogenic bacteria to take hold. Each acid attack lasts about 20 minutes. After 20 minutes your saliva buffers the acid attack and starts the process of remineralizing your teeth. The acid attack starts over with every sip of pop. In addition to decay or cavities or caries, drinking a lot of pop has been linked to diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis. All the calories in pop come from sugar. There is no nutritional value in pop.

Make a resolution to chew sugarless gum. Make sure you are chewing sugarless gum to avoid providing sugar which allows cariogenic bacteria to produce cavities. Even better chew gum flavored with 100% Xylitol. Xylitol is a natural sweetener found in plants and fruits. Pure xylitol is a white crystalline substance that looks and taste like sugar but has 40% fewer calories. Xylitol is used in sugar-free gum and mints. Xylitol has been shown to inhibit the growth of *Streptococcus mutans*, the oral bacteria that causes cavities.

Make a resolution to floss every day. Flossing removes plaque and debris that stick to teeth and gums between your teeth. Plaque is a soft, sticky accumulation that occurs on teeth and gum tissue. It is the host to a complex system of microorganisms including bacteria which cause inflammatory diseases of the gingiva called gingivitis and periodontitis or gum disease. If plaque is left on the teeth it increases in mass and thickness and the number and types of bacteria increase. Gingivitis is a result of increased plaque and results in swollen and red gums that bleed easily. If plaque continues to accumulate mineral salts are deposited into the plaque and calculus is formed. With the formation of calculus, periodontitis or gum disease can take hold. Calculus cannot be removed by brushing or flossing requiring a visit to the dentist to be removed. Accumulation of plaque also leads to caries (cavities).

Make a resolution to see the dentist and get you gum disease treated. It is estimated that 80 percent of American adults currently have some form of periodontitis. Periodontal diseases range from simple gum inflammation to more serious disease which results in damage to the supporting structures of your teeth and tooth loss. Periodontal disease has also been linked to other serious health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and preterm premature babies. If your dentist has determined that you have gum disease it is important to have the gum disease treated and to maintain your 3 month cleaning schedule to prevent tooth loss and more expensive treatments to replace missing teeth.

Make a resolution to visit your dentist every 6 months for exam and cleaning. Regular exams can spot problems when they are small and therefore more inexpensive to fix. Regular cleanings help to prevent plaque and calculus buildup which can lead to decay and periodontal or gum disease. Start your year on the right track and call your dentist to schedule an appointment today.

Written by Carlos Vallecillo, DDS and Rossana Menna, DDS

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