

Sixth Series of Questions; Answers on Dental Health

(This is the sixth in a series of questions and answers on dental health published by Torrance Press, in cooperation with the Harbor District Dental Society, in observance of National Children's Dental Health Week February 5 through 11.)

MY 25-YEAR-OLD SISTER HAS JUST HAD TWO TEETH EXTRACTED. SHE SAYS THAT SHE'S NOT GOING TO GET A BRIDGE TO REPLACE THEM, SINCE THEY ARE BACK TEETH AND WON'T SHOW ANYHOW. I THINK THAT SHE SHOULD GET A BRIDGE.

Any permanent tooth that is extracted or accidentally lost should be replaced with an artificial tooth. If it is not, the other teeth tend to drift into the empty space. Once they are out of their proper position, there is likely to be too much stress on certain teeth when food is chewed. This causes further displacement of the teeth and injury to the bone and to the tissues that attach the teeth to the jaws.

Food is more likely to become packed into the spaces between the teeth irregular, and this leads to more decay. Food packed between the teeth also irritates the gums and the bone and may cause the gums to become diseased.

WOULD YOU TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT PERIODONTAL DISEASE? IS THERE ANY TREATMENT FOR IT?

Periodontal disease is disease of the gums and other supporting structures of the teeth. (The word "periodontal" comes from two Greek words that literally mean "around the tooth.") Sometimes this disease is called pyorrhea.

One of the causes of periodontal disease is calculus or tartar, a hard-crust-like material that is deposited on the

surface of the teeth where the gums and the crowns meet. Calculus irritates the gums. Other irritants are worn-out fillings and crowns; sharp edges of badly decayed teeth, food wedged between the teeth and against the gums and ill-fitting partial dentures or bridges.

Periodic cleaning of the teeth by a dentist, as part of regular check-ups to assure proper care of all dental problems, is one of the means of preventing periodontal disease. Proper brushing at home helps avoid the deposit of calculus on the teeth, although brushing cannot remove it once it has formed.

Once periodontal disease has developed, it usually can be cured if treatment begins before the disease is too advanced. Although treatment by a dentist is essential, complete cooperation of the patient in home care is most important if the treatment is

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AREN'T DENTURES JUST AS GOOD AS YOUR OWN TEETH? SO WHY SHOULD I BOTHER TO TAKE CARE OF MY TEETH?

No, dentures are not as good as natural teeth. They have improved greatly in recent years and we should be grateful that they are as efficient as they are. But we can't improve on nature. Would you ever say that an artificial hand or an artificial leg was as good as a natural hand or leg?

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