

"WHY?"

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In a traditional dental practice, a dental examination is about discovering what is wrong with a plan to fix it. Your teeth may also be cleaned at that appointment, if requested. Based on the dental practice policy, the examination may be rather cursory or quite complete with full mouth x-rays and even model replicas of the patient's teeth. After the examination, the patient is usually given a list of procedures to be performed - if the tooth is decayed, remove the decay and repair it. If it is broken down, crown it. If a tooth is missing, replace it. If there is a toothache, get a root canal or remove it. If your gums bleed, have cleanings or "deep cleanings." These are all important procedures, and when they are necessary they need to be performed well. The key thing that is missing, and what I'm hearing more and more from my new patients, is "Why does this keep on happening - the dentist(s) keep on finding more to do - when will this ever stop?" In other words, "WHY?" The mission of the Dental Wellness Center was in large part developed to answer this question. Its mission is to educate its patients about the status of their oral system to such a degree that they can make informed choices about its future. I discovered through the years that most patients' dental problems are the result of what they haven't been taught, and treatment performed on teeth viewed solely as a single element, rather than part of a multi-element system that needs to be in harmony with the entire oral system for sustained health.

Contrast between wellness and traditional approach

How does a wellness approach to dentistry differ from that of a traditional dental practice? For sure we want to find out what's wrong and what needs to be fixed, but more importantly we want to discover the causes of their need. Examples of new patient assessments in the Wellness Center are: pH testing, as decay and gum disease thrive in an acidic oral environment. Another assessment is a complete oral cancer screening that includes technology that can detect pre-cancer and cancer on the spot, rather than having a painful biopsy. Other assessments include measurements of gum pockets and bleeding scores, as well as phase contrast microscopy to determine the type and amount of bacteria that are in a patient's plaque.

Why not a teeth cleaning on my first appointment?

Another question we frequently hear from potential new patients to The Dental Wellness Center is "Why can't I get my teeth cleaned on my first appointment?" We have found through the years that eight out of ten new patients have some form of gum disease and over half of these patients had been having routine cleanings. Teeth cleanings are essentially removal of the hard deposits that are formed by these bacteria, along with any soft plaque that might be missed by the patient - and hopefully some patient education and home care coaching. We feel that the emphasis should be on how to control gum disease by discovering the true nature of its main cause - oral bacteria - which is different for each patient, rather than continually cleaning off the results of their presence. Yes, the mouth is connected to the rest of the body and can influence it as well as be influenced by it - a reciprocal affair. One of the latest research reports from the American

Heart Association journal, *Circulation* cites a direct connection between oral pathogens (associated with periodontal disease, endodontic lesions, and caries) and acute heart attacks! It tells us that "as many as half of heart attacks are being triggered by oral pathogens. Oral bacteria were found in every thrombus, and 30% had live oral pathogens in the clot." Being that there are over 700 types of bacteria that can inhabit a mouth, we take samples of a new patient's bacteria from their cheeks, tongue and between their gums and teeth and send them to a laboratory for an oral biofilm analysis. This is the only means that can show whether or not these bad bacteria exist in one's mouth.

Assessment of your entire oral system

Other assessments in The Dental Wellness Center include digital x-ray analysis of teeth bone support, oral pathology and decay, TMJ evaluation for possible migraine, head and neck discomfort relief, laser cavity detection, teeth wear assessment, and tests for Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) along with workable solutions for each of these conditions. The structure of events that occur with patients in the Center differ markedly from those in a traditional dental practice because, being educational and prevention based, our attention first lies in finding an answer to "WHY?"