

# “Just a cleaning...”

More often than not, our most common call from a new patient goes something like this:

“Good morning! Premier Dental! This is Jane. How may I help you?”

“Uh, hi! I would like to make an appointment.”

“I’ll be happy to help you with that. May I have your name?”

“John Smith.”

“Have you been to see us before?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Great! We always welcome new patients. Is there anything currently hurting or bothering you?”

“No. I just moved to town and need a new dentist. I saw your ads on TV and in the newspaper. I just want to set up an appointment to get my teeth cleaned.”

“We’ll be happy to get you set up, however, since it is not an emergency situation, our doctors request to see you first themselves to do a thorough exam and x-rays and determine the type of cleaning you will need. Will that be okay with you?”

At this point the new patient is often a little confused or unsure of what is going on. They just want their teeth cleaned, and here is this doctor telling them to do something else first. So what’s the deal? Why do we feel this is so important?

First off, we as a practice want to do everything within our power to make the patient experience, from the very first visit, as easy and comfortable as possible. We never want to make anyone feel obligated to anything they are uncomfortable with, so if anyone is really unsure, we just get them in and polish their teeth like they are likely used to.

But did you know there are many types of cleanings? Every patient has a different mouth with a different state of health. The level of inflammation, the number of missing teeth, restorations in the mouth; all of these things alter the type of “cleaning” a patient may need. Most often, the patient is not aware these problems even exist.

A hygiene visit is medicine for your mouth. Much in the same way a physician would not prescribe a medication without examining the patient, a dentist may not feel comfortable with a “one size fits all” hygiene appointment prior to looking in the patients mouth. Different types of cleanings take different equipment and different amounts of time. Other issues may also exist that the doctor feels need to be treated urgently.

Most patients are familiar with the exam that takes place at a normal “cleaning”, but a complete exam is a whole different thing. At true comprehensive exam a full mouth set of x-rays will be taken, which is a set of pictures that show every single tooth all the way to the end of the roots. A panoramic x-ray may also be taken to look for oral cancers, cysts, joint pathology, sinus trouble, and more. The doctor will look over all of this information and then do a tooth-by-tooth exam in the mouth. He will take measurements around each tooth to look for areas where gum disease may exist. He will also check the neck, throat, lips, cheeks, and tongue for oral cancers or other problems. At our office, we then give a video “tour” of the mouth, so you can see with your own eyes the areas that may lead to trouble.

Periodontal, or gum, disease is one of the most common, and unfortunately, most under-diagnosed diseases in America. It affects 85-90% of people over the age of 35 to some degree! And most people are unaware of even having a problem until it is shown to them. It is essentially an infection of the gum and bone around teeth. It causes the bone to deteriorate and the gums to bleed or recede. Pockets of gum tissue form that stay full of decaying food and bacteria all the time. This can lead to discomfort, bad breath, abscesses, and loss of teeth. Not only is it a mouth problem, but it is also linked to heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, lung infections, and premature births! Every time you eat or brush when you have gum disease you introduce bacteria into your blood stream, and this infection can settle in places it should not be. This is a serious problem!

If you have or are headed toward gum disease, the treatment is much more involved than a regular “cleaning”. It may simply be that the hygienist

needs to take more time with you to treat you correctly. They may have to use special tools to get to troublesome areas. In true periodontal therapy, each half of the mouth is numbed so the pockets under the gums can be cleaned properly and comfortably. The procedure can take several trips to complete and the maintenance afterward is much more involved. It is crucial to see your dentist regularly to avoid a reoccurrence of the disease process.

All in all, it is impossible to determine the treatment that is correct for a patient over the phone. There are many types of crowns, many types of fillings, and yes, many types of cleanings available to the patient. Only through proper diagnosis can we know what YOU need to receive the type of care that YOU deserve.

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