

Your Dental Health

The contents of this series of "Dental Health Talks" was originally prepared by the American Dental Association. They are made available for Tundra Times through the Public Health Education Office of the Alaska Native Health Service.

It is well known that our dental health program in Interior Alaska has not yet reached everyone needing dental services. This is especially true about the people in the rural communities. However, everyone understands how important it is to take care of our teeth which is a part of our total well-being.

No. 12 — Reducing Dental Costs

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There is little doubt that people are concerned about high costs in health care. Dentists, too, are concerned and want to keep the costs of care down.

This article will examine ways you can effectively reduce dental costs while increasing the benefits of good oral health.

One of the primary considerations is the economics of the regular dental check-up. Too many people try to "save money" on dental bills by not seeing the dentist until they have serious problems. This not only defeats the purpose of preventive dentistry, but it is much more expensive in the long run.

Emergencies are always more expensive, and too often emergency repairs are only a stopgap toward solving the real problem. Once the disease process has taken a strong hold, it often lasts longer and costs more to treat. Consequently, there is little that can replace the regular check-up for economy.

Following the dentist's orders is important, too. The dentist may suggest a special program of oral hygiene or diet. Far too many patients ignore the expert advice that they have solicited and paid for.

The most cost-saving step of them all, of course, is not to become the victim of oral disease in the first place. This opens the broad topic of prevention which is discussed in detail in other articles in this series. Daily use of dental floss and regular brushing using a fluoride dentrifice in the method prescribed by the patient's dentist are important. Certain accepted fluoride toothpastes have been proven to reduce dental decay. A sensible diet that avoids over-indulgence in sweets, particularly between meals, can reduce dental bills.

In recent decades, there has been a shift in the kinds of treatments that dentists provide. Advances in preventive procedures have allowed the dentist to shift his treatment emphasis from reparative to preventive care. But the effectiveness of new preventive treatments in saving teeth and saving dental costs depend

on the cooperation of the patient in daily self-care at home.

The dental patient as a consumer of commercial dental products should be certain that he is purchasing useful oral health aids. To assist the public, the American Dental Association in recent years has expanded its activities in the evaluation and certification of dental products.

The dentist, himself, has traditionally depended on the ADA for evaluation and classification of the professional products he uses in his practice. The patient-consumer can look for the acceptance statements of the ADA Council on Dental Therapeutics and the ADA Council on Dental Materials and Devices on toothpastes, powered toothbrushes, oral irrigators and denture adhesives.

Dental insurance, offered mostly in group plans such as those of employers and unions, can be a good investment. The patient should check to see whether there is a plan under which he would qualify for membership.

And of course, all taxpayers are able to include dental expenses and the costs of prescription drugs which exceed a certain percentage of their total income as deductions for federal income tax purposes.

Even with the high cost of living, an entire community can supply better dental health for a cost of about 10 cents a person per year by fluoridating its drinking water supply. About 100 million people — nearly half the American population — now benefit from the fluoride content in community water supplies.

Finally, don't waste money with "quack" cures. It has been estimated that Americans spend more than \$2 billion a year on health quacks and quack products. Denture construction and repair is one of the most frequent areas for abuse by quacks. Dentures fitted by unlicensed persons and mail-order dentures can cost the patient more in the long run when the damage ill-fitting dentures cause has to be corrected.