



Airway, Breathing, Coronavirus

By Virginia McMillan
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

Let's begin 2021 by bringing dental health into our overall health focus. The mouth and the body are not separate systems. Attention to the basics and dental-medical cooperation will give you the best daily routine.

Cavities develop when the outer surface of the tooth is dissolved away by acid erosion, allowing bacteria and waste products into the tooth. When bacteria go into the tooth pulp or gum tissue, the infection becomes systemic (abscess) and can become hospital-severe (sepsis). Keep your teeth clean between meals and snacks (brushing and flossing) to avoid cavities.

Regular dental exams are the best way to avoid expensive treatments or related medical (ER) visits. Finding small problems and fixing them early helps you save money and learn the techniques that can avoid that problem in the future. Your periodic visits let us identify



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periodontal disease flareups and oral cancer tissue changes, keeping them treatable. Dry mouth from mouth breathing or from medication side effects can accelerate dental decay rates and be very discouraging. See your dentist to evaluate options for adult dry mouth relief.

Children's decay problems can be soft tissue related (it's not just "baby bottle decay" any more). Tongue-ties and lip-tied tissue will limit the ability of the tongue to reach and cleanse teeth during/after eating. This food film that develops is called plaque, and it gives bacteria a safe place to metabolize (digest) the carbohydrates and produce acids — causing cavities. The lip-tie prevents easy lifting of the lip to make room for a toothbrush (or wet washcloth-finger) to wipe food away. The result? Cavities develop. Toothbrushing when it hurts to pull up the lip causes battles at home and frustrations for both child and adult. Dentists today can provide release of these ties in coord-

ination with speech therapists and muscle exercises before and after treatment.

Coronavirus has sharpened dentistry's focus on environmental health protection for the patient. Dentistry's decades where employees have been gloved, masked, shielded and gowned/jacketed during treatment visits fits this season well. But a lot goes on behind the scenes! We now focus on the patient environment and experience: Improved air quality with multiple-filtered air exchanges within the room, lowered aerosol treatment methods, pre-procedural oral rinses to lower the oral bacterial population and UV-C light to cleanse the air (with or without ozone) between patients.

Airway and Breathing: What? In 2017 the American Dental Association's "Sleep Related Breathing Disorders (SRBD)" recognized the seriousness of medical conditions caused by anatomic airway collapse and altered respiratory control mechanisms.

Our dental office is well positioned to identify patients at greater risk for SRBD, and to collaborate with sleep-specialty physicians who diagnose the

condition. Together we review treatment options and evaluate changes over time.

Oral appliance therapy (OAT) can often provide relief for the patient: Improved energy and improved deep sleep cycles are noticeable. A relatively new dental laser treatment on the soft palate can provide snoring relief when obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is not an issue.

Finally, remember that our bodies are a lot of separate systems working together! A recent book, "The Oxygen Advantage," by Patrick McKeown, has an understandable update on the how blood oxygen levels can be increased using a breathing technique that is counter-intuitive. From athletics to daily life, child to adult, this information is well explained and is another way to improve your health this year. I recommend it to patients and have a few loaners in the office.

I hope this information refreshes you in your health resolutions for 2021! Let's apply the things we've had to learn in 2020 to make a better and healthier 2021.

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