

Benefits Spotlight

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Q&A with Dr. Jeff: Do I really need to see my dentist twice a year?

Did you know that all Delta Dental of Iowa dental plans cover two preventive dental visits a year at no out-of-pocket costs for members? It's important to take full advantage of that benefit and see your dentist twice a year. Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, Chief Dental Officer for Delta Dental of Iowa, explains why.

Q: Why is it important for people to schedule dental appointments twice a year?

Dr. Chaffin: Dental disease is largely preventable. The majority of diseases are cavities and gum disease. When we talk about preventing dental diseases, that is accomplished by one's home self-care and professional prevention in the dental office.

Q: What are the potential consequences of avoiding regular dental check-ups and cleanings?

Dr. Chaffin: Delaying routine dental cleanings and check-ups can cause dental cavities and gum disease to progress without your knowledge. Often, when dental cavities and gum disease are diagnosed early, they can be reversed and/or treated with a minor procedure. If the disease processes continue, the treatment to "fix" the dental disease can be a more intense type of treatment that's often more expensive as well.

Q: What preventive measures or treatments are performed during these twice-yearly dental visits to protect long-term oral health?

Dr. Chaffin: A dental examination is the first part of a preventive visit. During this exam, all the hard and soft tissues within and surrounding your mouth are examined. Dental professionals are looking for signs of cavities, gum disease, and oral cancer, just to name a few. As needed, x-rays are taken to aid this diagnosis. Based on the findings related to the health of your gums, the dentist will likely recommend a routine cleaning or a "deep cleaning" if you have advanced gum disease (called periodontal disease).

Additionally, based on your age and risk of developing cavities, professional fluoride applications may be recommended as well as dental sealants for recently erupted molars (teeth in the back of your mouth).

Q: Are there any specific age groups or demographics that benefit particularly from scheduling dental appointments twice a year? If so, why?

Dr. Chaffin: Dental prevention is important for everyone. Many don't understand that even a baby should have dental visits, as cavities can start as soon as teeth erupt. The first dental

visit should be by age 1, or 6 months after the eruption of the first tooth. Others may think that older individuals with dentures may not need to routinely see a dentist, but a dental visit is important to look for signs of things like oral cancer.

Q: What are the common misconceptions or excuses people have for not scheduling twice-yearly dental appointments, and how can we address them?

Dr. Chaffin: Many people get busy in their lives and fail to maintain their twice-a-year dental appointment. Others don't understand the value of dental prevention. We need to help patients understand that these quick dental visits can save time and money down the road. We also need to ensure that patients understand that oral health is part of overall health.

Q: Are there any recent advancements in dental technology or treatments that further showcase the need for regular dental visits?

Dr. Chaffin: Some of the biggest advancements may be in dental x-rays. There are now 3-D dental images and software that can help dentists diagnose and develop treatment plans.

3 tooth-friendly swaps to spice up your coffee

For many of us, the day doesn't truly begin until we've had that first sip of coffee. But if you like your cup of joe brimming with sweet flavors, your morning ritual could be harming your teeth. The good news is that there are tooth-friendly coffee flavorings that can enhance your brew without compromising your oral health. In fact, many of them add a sprinkling of added health benefits. Here, we share three simple swaps that your taste buds and teeth will love.

1. **Stevia instead of sugar:** Stevia is natural sweetener that comes from a plant. Although it's sweet (much sweeter than sugar, in fact), it doesn't cause cavities the way regular sugar does. So, if you like your coffee on the sweeter side but prefer to keep your teeth out of the crosshairs, swap in stevia for sugar.
2. **Cocoa powder instead of chocolate syrups:** Mocha fans, this one is for you. Instead of adding chocolate syrups to your coffee, add a scoop of unsweetened 100% cocoa powder. Cocoa powder not only adds rich chocolate flavor but also includes antioxidants that protect your teeth and gums from damage caused by inflammation.¹
3. **Cinnamon instead of pumpkin spice syrups:** Can't resist a pumpkin spice coffee when fall arrives each year? Try adding cinnamon instead of a sugary pumpkin spice syrup, and you may be surprised that they evoke the same autumn-inspired flavor. Like cocoa powder, cinnamon is a wonderful coffee additive because it not only adds warm, spicy flavor but also packs extra health benefits into your cup. Sprinkling in cinnamon delivers natural antimicrobial properties that can help fight bacteria in your mouth, reducing the risk of tooth decay and gum disease.²

A simple stain-fighting strategy for coffee drinkers

All coffee drinkers — even those who drink their coffee black, without flavoring — struggle with stained teeth. To lessen coffee's staining power, simply drink a glass of water to rinse your teeth and mouth immediately after finishing your cup. This simple action goes a long way to keeping the deep brown java hue off your pearly whites.

Enjoying a delicious cup of coffee doesn't have to mean putting your dental health on the backburner. By swapping in tooth-friendly coffee flavorings like stevia, cocoa powder and cinnamon, you can enhance your coffee break while supporting a healthy smile.

REFERENCES:

1. [Dental E-Hub](#)
2. [National Library of Medicine](#)