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MOUTHPIECE

issue 1

Welcome to the first edition of our new format newsletter. In this issue we let you know the latest on how regularly you should visit us for dental check-ups, examine whether Britain is catching up with America in terms of beautiful smiles, and take a look at the gruesome but fascinating subject of forensic dentistry. We hope you will find the articles both interesting and informative.



FIRE FIRE!

As you may know, we are recovering from the effects of an arson attack in the adjoining building. The fire crews involved did a great job in limiting the fire's spread but, inevitably, there was much water damage. After a brief period of closure, we have done our best to reschedule all treatments and examinations affected, but if for any reason you have not as yet been re-contacted, please call our reception.

We have already installed new telephone and computer systems and with the rebuilding of the main reception's seating area, we hope to emerge from the flames 'phoenix-like' and with greater comfort for all our valued patients than before.

We are determined to make this inconvenience and temporary set-back work in everyone's interests to give you an even better service in as short a time as possible. Thank you for your understanding and kind support.

Boosting Your Smile Power

Your smile is the first thing that most people notice, according to research, so if you want to make a good impression it is important to make sure your smile is looking its best. Our teeth can easily become stained by drinking tea, coffee and red wine, or by smoking, and they also become darker over the years. Having your teeth professionally whitened is the ideal way to reverse this process and put the sparkle back.

Many people are now having their teeth whitened before a special occasion, such as a wedding or a special date, or before they go on holiday, although there are plenty who decide to treat themselves just to boost their confidence!

At Stricklands Dental Fitness Centre, we offer a professional whitening chairside system, along with custom-made gel trays for you to take away and use at home for a fortnight. Our special "Smile Week" promotional offer is being extended to treatments undertaken up to and including 31st August 2005 as compensation to you for the disruption to our normal environment over the rebuilding period. The offer price of £375 represents a large discount over the normal fee of £550 and we hope that as many of you as possible will take advantage of it. For more information, please telephone or ask next time you visit – we'll be happy to help.

Did you know?

Crocodiles don't clean their teeth – they let a little bird called a plover do it for them!
The bird picks the crocodiles' teeth for them, removing and eating scraps of leftover food.



Dental Check-ups – How often should you have them?

Late last year, the NHS announced new guidelines stating how often people should have dental check-ups. This announcement received a huge amount of coverage in the media, and since then many patients have been asking how often you should visit us. So we thought we should tell you more about the guidelines, and explain to you our policies on regular dental examinations.

The new guidelines came from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which is linked to the NHS.

They recommend that **the interval between check-ups should be decided separately for each patient, depending on their oral health needs.** For adults this can range from between every 3 months to every two years, and for the under-18s it should be between 3 and 12 months.

At our practice, we have always believed that patients should be given check-ups as often as necessary. Often the traditional interval of six months is ideal, but sometimes we may need to see a patient more often to ensure their teeth and gums remain as healthy as possible.

Conversely, if your teeth and gums are in a particularly good condition, we may not need to see you as often as every six months – though they would have to be extraordinarily healthy to warrant a check-up only every two years!

It is important that you visit us as recommended. Sometimes you may feel that there is no need to have a check-up because your teeth look and feel fine, but often dental problems may exist without showing any symptoms.

A decaying tooth does not always cause pain – it depends on how quickly the decay spreads. Similarly gum disease, which is the biggest cause of tooth loss among adults, often goes unnoticed by sufferers. Oral cancer could be similarly overlooked.

By examining your teeth regularly, we can nip any potential problems in the bud, saving you time and unnecessary expense.

If you are overdue for a check-up, please give us a call and book an appointment, and let us help you to enjoy dental health for life!



Dentures: *the Facts*

Traditionally, dentures have tended to receive a bad press, being viewed as something to be endured rather than something designed to help the wearer.

But modern techniques and materials mean that dentures can now be a far better fit, making eating and speaking much easier, and look far more natural.

Dentures are one of the options when all or some of your teeth are missing. They are made to look as much like your natural teeth as possible, and today's colour matching methods mean that they should appear almost indistinguishable from your remaining teeth.

It can take a few weeks to get used to a new denture, and you may need to visit the practice once or twice for minor adjustments, but once this initial settling in period has passed they should be comfortable and easy to wear.

The key to keeping your dentures trouble free is to take good care of them and your mouth, and to replace them when necessary (every 6-7 years on average).

We will advise you on the best way to clean them, what to use, and what not to do (e.g. you should never put them in hot water and you must never let them dry out). We will also be able to share some valuable tips with you, such as cleaning your dentures over a bowl of water or a folded towel to break their fall if you drop them.

There is a temptation to think that because you have dentures, your mouth and gums are less important, but you do still need to take good care of them to avoid further problems. Brush your gums, tongue and the roof of your mouth twice a day with a soft toothbrush; and **make sure you visit us regularly (at least once every two years) so we can check any remaining teeth are healthy, check that your dentures still fit properly, and also assess your mouth for signs of oral disease.**



The Incas used to be hot on oral healthcare – literally! They would roast twigs from the South American pepper tree until the ends were smoking, and place the hot twig against their gums to reveal “healthy” new red flesh.

Did you know?

The Great British Smile

– are we catching up with the Americans?

There's no doubt about it, cosmetic dentistry in the UK is booming.

More and more people want a great-looking smile, and are increasingly viewing it as a lifestyle “must have”, taking priority over new cars and holidays.

Given that we have traditionally followed America's lead in the quest for a perfect smile, it looks as if the upsurge in cosmetic dentistry is set to continue.

Research shows that most Americans believe their smile is an important asset that can influence their career and



their love life. In the UK we are increasingly thinking along the same lines, although experts are divided in their opinions as to why. Many feel it is to do with the influence that celebrities have on us – the media is full of images of film and pop stars with perfect teeth, and we want the same.

Others feel the reason lies deeper. It may be that the traditional NHS dental service for many practices meant check-ups and fillings. Now **with private dentistry providing us with a far wider choice of treatments, we want to make the most of it.** Similarly, it may be that because as a nation our teeth are far healthier now, we want them to look their best – simply hanging onto teeth in any shape or form is no longer enough.

Continuing development in dentistry means that there are now more top class materials at lower prices, which puts cosmetic dentistry within the price range of many more people. The natural appearance of the materials also makes them far more attractive to patients.

Whatever the reason, **if you want to improve your smile, there are a wide range of treatments available.**

Tooth whitening is extremely popular, and can have a huge effect on your smile. It can remove years of staining (commonly caused by tea, coffee, red wine and smoking) and because our teeth get darker as we get older, having them lightened also takes years off you!

Many people are now choosing to have tooth-coloured fillings instead of the traditional grey amalgam ones, and these can make a huge difference to how you feel about your smile.

Crowns too are now far better than they used to be. Gold ones are increasingly falling out of favour with patients, simply because today's porcelain ones look convincingly real.

If you would like to find out how your smile could be enhanced, please call us or ask next time you visit.

Forensic Dentistry... The Truth behind the Tooth

Forensic science and its role in solving crimes has a strong following among members of the general public - a fact borne out by the success of TV series and books such as CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and Patricia Cornwell's novels about forensic pathologist Dr Kay Scarpetta.

But many people do not realise that dentistry also plays a vital role in forensic science, helping to identify the victims of crime and disasters as well as providing evidence in criminal courts.

Like fingerprints, our teeth are unique, and the dental treatment we have, combined with the detailed records kept by our dentist, means our teeth can be used to identify us.

Comparison of someone's teeth with the relevant dental records (held by their dentist) is the most obvious way of doing this. But even without these records and with few teeth left, forensic odontologists (dentists) can give a good indication of the age of the victim as well as their eating and oral hygiene habits, which can give vital clues as to their identity.

After major disasters for example, a range of experts, including forensic odontologists, are often called in to help identify the victims. One of

their roles can be to take dental X-rays that can then be cross-referenced with records provided by victims' dentists. DNA is sometimes taken from the victims (often from two extracted teeth), but dental records are usually a much quicker way of providing a positive identification.

Forensic odontologists can also be called in to help identify fire and crime victims, as well as the perpetrators of a crime. Bite marks can be photographed and examined, and compared with the dental impressions of any suspects – **a burglar was once convicted following the identification of a bite mark which he made in a piece of cheese left at the scene!**



Forensic odontology is very much a specialist area. For more information, visit the website of the British Association for Forensic Odontology, www.bafo.org.uk.



Mind the gap?

If you have a small imperfection in your smile, it can be difficult to decide whether to get it fixed or simply leave it as it is. A gap between the front teeth for example, can be viewed as unsightly, or as adding a certain character to a smile.

Some people may not like their smile's unique points while others are quite happy with the way their teeth look despite comments from friends.

As with many similar issues, **the real question is whether you are happy with your smile.** Just because it does not conform to the stereo-typed "ideal" smile as seen on many Hollywood stars does not mean you have to change it.

Madonna is a prime example of this. She is constantly under public scrutiny, with photos in the media on a virtually weekly basis. Yet she has decided that she likes the gap between her teeth, that it is a part of who she is, and so she has resisted any pressure to have it fixed.

However not all our patients have the same self-confidence as Madonna, **and if you feel that you would benefit from having a gap removed then there are a number of options open to you.**

These can include veneers, which are very thin porcelain layers which are fixed to your teeth. The veneers hide any imperfections, while also matching your other teeth, giving a very natural appearance.

The simplest method for relatively small defects is bonding, where a tooth-coloured filling material is bonded to your teeth to close the gap. The material is shaped and shade-matched to blend in with your natural teeth.

If you would like advice on how to enhance your smile, please ask next time you visit.

Questions & Answers

"My dentist and hygienist keep telling me I need to clean under my gumline more thoroughly, and that just brushing the area is not enough. But cleaning around each individual tooth is so time-consuming – do I really need to do it?"

Cleaning between your teeth and under the gumline is vital to help keep your gums healthy. If you don't do it, a layer of bacteria called plaque can build up on your teeth. This then releases poisons which irritate your gums, and lead to gum disease. Often gum disease can go unnoticed by sufferers in the early stages, but if left untreated it can cause a bad taste in your mouth, bad breath and sore gums. In its more advanced stages, it can cause your gums to shrink away from your teeth, and the bone supporting your teeth can be destroyed. This means your teeth will become loose, and may fall out. So while it may take a little time to clean your mouth thoroughly each day, it is certainly time well spent, and will help you to keep your teeth for life.

"My son has been told he needs a mouthguard for school sports. Is there any difference between the ones available in the shops and those produced by a dentist?"

Mouthguards are an essential part of a sports kit these days, particularly for contact sports such as rugby, martial arts and boxing, and those involving moving objects such as hockey, lacrosse and cricket. For certain sports we may also advise additional protection. Mouthguards help to protect you against broken and damaged teeth and a broken or dislocated jaw. To do their job properly, it is essential that they have the correct rigidity for the sport, and fit comfortably and snugly. The ones produced by a dentist are custom made from an accurate impression of the teeth so will fit and protect best. The cost of a professionally made mouthguard is negligible by comparison with the risks and potential costs of accidental damage to your child's teeth and the long-term implications of such an accident.



Did you know?

The first commercial on British TV, in September 1955, was for a toothpaste.