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If It Ain't Broke...FIX IT!!!

Dentistry has traditionally been a business based upon need, and often patients have the mindset that if insurance does not cover something, they don't want it. I have found, however, that when patients truly value dental health and wellness, they disregard insurance limitations and opt for ideal restoration of their teeth and prevention of dental problems. It is the responsibility of the dental team to be sure that patients understand the underlying causes of their current dental situations and show them how they can prevent further deterioration and future dental problems rather than simply treat each tooth individually as problems arise.

Bruxism, or tooth grinding, is a major contributor of dental problems, and most patients do not even realize they have this destructive habit because it typically occurs while sleeping. Bruxism can be evidenced as mild wear or chipping or may be more advanced with severe shortening or flattening of the teeth, bone loss, tooth sensitivity, or broken teeth with a history of crowns and root canals. Cracks in the teeth that develop from bruxism allow bacteria to enter the tooth which causes tooth decay. Excessive forces on dental restorations can cause them to separate or pull away from the tooth allowing for leakage of bacteria. The crushing forces of bruxism compress the tooth and allow the crystalline enamel to shatter at the gumline creating a notch, called an abfraction, and sometimes the gum tissue and bone will recede away from the tooth resulting in periodontal disease.

Bruxism can occur in patients of all ages and can be diagnosed and prevented before true damage has occurred so that the teeth can be preserved for a lifetime. A common, conservative treatment for bruxism is the wearing of a hard occlusal guard fabricated by a dentist. If bruxism is detected and treated early enough (along with good hygiene practices, of course,) the beautiful smile of a 20-year-old can be maintained throughout a lifetime. If teeth are already severely damaged, a more extensive cosmetic and restorative treatment plan may be needed. We need to think prevention rather than repair when it comes to dental health and get out of that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality presented by the insurance companies.

Smile Specialists!