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### **Teeth...one of your most valuable possessions!**

The recent downturn of our economy has affected most all of us in some way. Even the dental profession has seen a decline in treatment rendered. Teeth are important for chewing, which helps provide proper nutrition to our bodies, and a healthy smile affects others' views of who we are. Unfortunately, dental care is looked at by some as a non-necessity. When finances are tight, some put dental examinations on hold, but down the road, this can prove to be costly.

I can't tell you the countless numbers of times I have had a patient who, after not having a dental examination for a couple or more years, was shocked to be told that they had a cavity large enough to now require a root canal and crown – a problem that if diagnosed earlier would have likely needed only a filling. I remember one patient in particular that came, after many years of not having been to a dentist, hoping to bleach her teeth. Instead, we removed half of her teeth due to advanced periodontal (gum) disease. Decay and periodontal disease are two dental problems that often do not cause symptoms until they are more advanced. Regular check-ups can diagnose these issues early when the fix is much less expensive and less painful.

The stress of the economy has also exacerbated another dental issue...bruxism, or tooth grinding. This parafunctional habit typically occurs at night during sleep, although a component of bruxism, clenching, sometimes occurs during the day as well. This habit can not only cause headaches and TMJ problems but can crack teeth. Most "bruxers" are unaware of the problem, but there can be evidence on the teeth, such as cracked, loose, or worn teeth and even receding gums. A dentist can see these signs during a dental exam.

The American Dental Association recommends a dental examination every 6 months. Some patients who have impeccable hygiene, low sugar intake, and minimal tartar build-up, can go up to a year between examinations. So my advice if you want to save money on dental expenses is eat right, brush and floss regularly, and see your dentist every 6 months so that dental problems are found early when the cost of repair is less.

**Smile Specialists!**