



Dental Care

Latest Dental Tech

Brushing your teeth is often pointed to as one of the simplest activities you can do.

It's as easy as brushing your teeth, right? But even this easiest of activities can go high tech. Check out these new gadgets to keep your smile shiny and bright.

TOOTHBRUSHES

These brushes are way more techy than the bristled sticks of plastics of yore.

Quip (starting at around \$25) is a subscription-based oral care line. They offer several different plans so that, without you giving it a second thought, a new brush head comes to your home every three months. The electric brush, which comes in an array of finishes and colors, ensures you're brushing for the full two minutes by using a series of 30 second pulses.

The Colgate Smart Electric Toothbrush (around \$100) is a toothbrush armed with AI that creates personalized recommendations based on your personal brushing pattern. These toothbrushes track and analyze your brushing movements to give you feedback about how you can brush better.

Foreo Issa (around \$100) is a svelte Swedish toothbrush with silicone bristles to massage your gums and teeth with soft brushes that are great for sensitive teeth. If you're an over-brusher or a hard brusher, this



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might be the gentle brush for you.

FLOSSING

It can't get much more simple than string stretched tight between your fingers, and it can't get much more sophisticated than these high-tech flossers.

The Instafloss (around \$200) promises a comfortable, effective, 10-second floss. It uses multiple water jets that you sweep around your mouth for a 360-degree floss around every single tooth. The makers say it's more comfortable than traditional string floss.

Burst Expanding Floss

(around \$10) looks like the simple strand of floss, but when activated by saliva, it expands to cover more surface area. It also features a charcoal coating that Burst says removes stains from teeth. The company says lab tests show Burst removes up to 85% of plaque on teeth that tooth-

brushes can't reach.

WATERPICKS

The Waterpick Sonic-Fusion 2.0 (around \$169) is a toothbrush and waterpick all in one. The latest version has twice the bristle tip speed and 30% more flossing power versus the original model, Waterpick says.

Give Kids a Smile

Give Kids a Smile is an American Dental Association program to give children who may not have access to dental care free oral health education, screenings, preventative care and treatment from volunteer dentists and other volunteer dental professionals.

More than 6 million children have received free services since Give Kids a Smile began in 2003.

HISTORY

Give Kids a Smile started in 2002, when Dr. Jeff Dalin and Dr. B. Ray Storm held the first event in a soon-to-be-demolished dental clinic in St. Louis. That event served 400 children. The ADA stepped in, recognizing the event's potential to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. As the program grew, so did the need for leadership. In 2011, the Give Kids a Smile Community Leadership Development Institute was founded to give program coordinators across the country a platform to learn and share best practices.

FOR PARENTS

You can find more information about free and low-cost



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oral health services, such as the Give Kids a Smile Program, by calling (844) 490-GKAS or contacting your state dental association. The American Dental Association also suggests contact local dental school clinics. CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, also provides free or low-cost health coverage for more than 7 million children up to age 19,

including eligible immigrants.

FOR DENTAL PROFESSIONALS

Give Kids a Smile is open to all dental professionals who want to participate. You can get a free toolkit from the American Dental Association that will help you plan and promote your Give Kids a Smile event, including legal forms

and guidance for offering these services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ADA can also help you reach out to organizations and groups that work with children and youth to help you identify children in need of oral health services.

Depending on the size and type of your event, you may also be eligible to receive edu-

cation, screening and product kits to help out. These kits include toothbrushes and toothpaste, health education cards, masks and more.

If you're a dental professional and can't host an event but still want to help out, the ADA will match you to local Give Kids a Chance events. Contact gkas@ada.org for more information.

Fluoride in Drinking Water

For almost 100 years, communities around the United States have fought cavities while quenching their thirst.

Fluoridated drinking water reduces cavities in children by about 25% in children and adults, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, saving money for families and the U.S. health system.

WHAT IS FLUORIDE?

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in many supplies of drinking water. It can be found in many over-the-counter dental products, such as toothpaste and mouthwash. It rebuilds weakened tooth enamel, slows down the loss of minerals from tooth enamel, reverses early signs of tooth decay and prevents the growth of harmful oral bacteria.

When fluoride is added to community drinking water supplies, only enough fluoride is added to bring the water supply up to the level recommended to prevent cavities. While fluoride can be toxic at certain doses, the amount added to community water supplies is much, much lower.

HISTORY

The American Dental Association has advocated for the fluoridation of community water supplies. Water fluoridation is also backed by several U.S. surgeons general, the



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American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization.

The benefits of fluoridation were discovered when a Colorado dentist noticed in the 1920s that certain mottled teeth — the product of higher, naturally occurring fluoride in water — were resistant to

decay. The first fluoridation programs rolled out in the 1940s as part of community studies, with the ADA making its first statement in favor of fluoridation in the 1950s.

The CDC named community water fluoridation as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.

DENTAL ENAMEL FLUOROSIS

The mottled teeth that tipped dentists off to the benefits of fluoride is a condition called dental fluorosis. It's a change in the appearance of tooth enamel that occurs when young children consume too much fluoride — naturally occurring or other-

wise — while their teeth are developing under the gums. Most laypeople can't see the telltale mottled appearance of fluorosis, and there are no other symptoms with the condition.

In addition, fluoride intake from toothpaste and mouthwashes can contribute to this condition.

All About Dental Sealants

Brushing and flossing are the first line of defense against cavities, but even the best tools will miss spots from time to time.

That's where sealants come in. Keep reading to learn more about this important tool in your oral health toolbox.

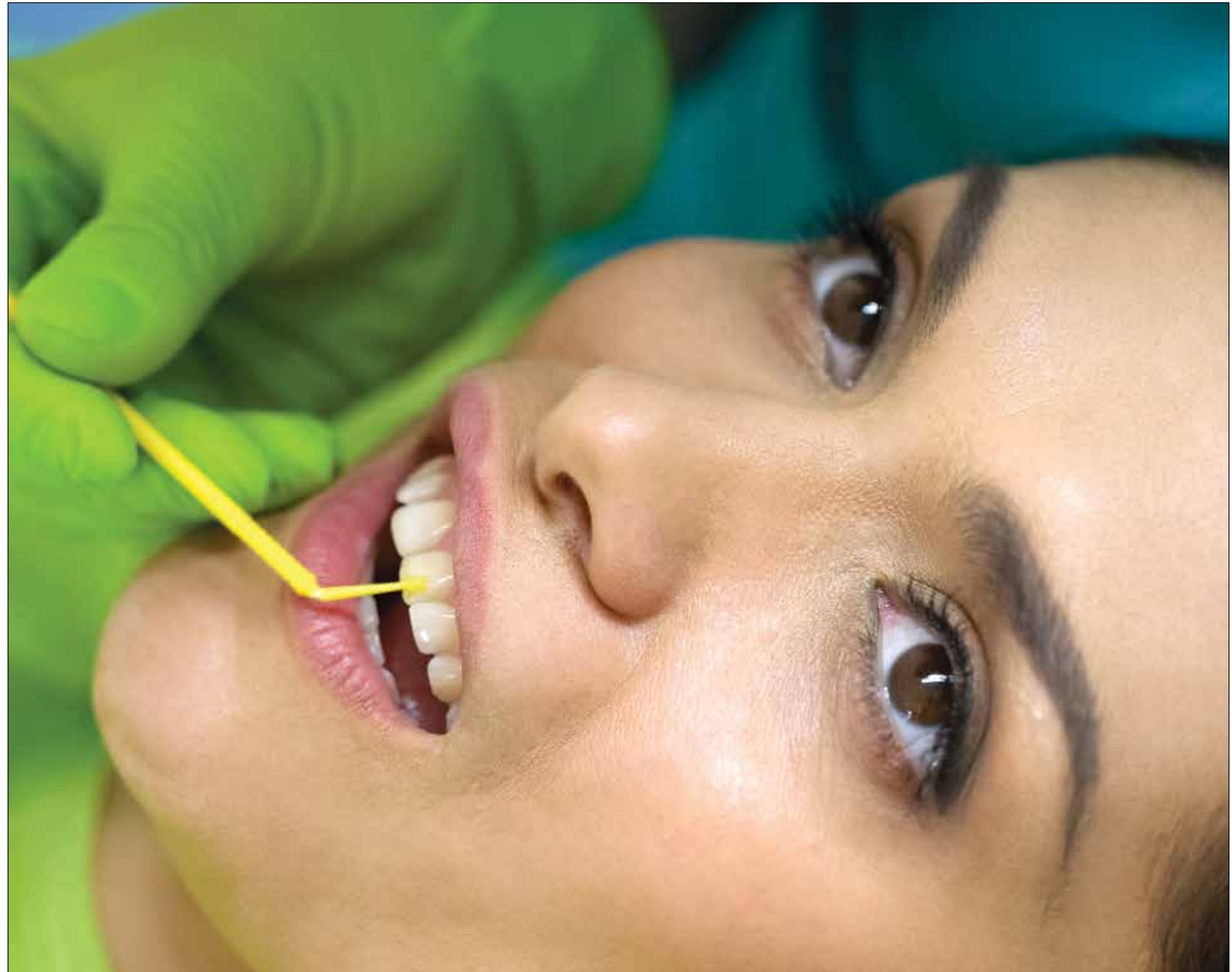
WHAT ARE SEALANTS?

Sealants are thin, protective coatings made from plastic or other dental materials that adhere to the chewing surfaces of your teeth. These are typically used on your back teeth, or molars, where the chewing surfaces are particularly rough and hard to reach. Sealants, the American Dental Association says, can reduce the risk of tooth decay by nearly 80%. And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that school-aged children without sealants have almost three times the cavities than children with sealants.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

Cavity-causing bacteria can produce acids that chew holes in your teeth, and those holes are cavities. Sealants keep bits of food out, cutting off the bacteria's food supply and keeping the acids from eating through your teeth.

Sealants are quick and painless. Your dentist will clean and dry your teeth and place



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an acidic gel to rough up the surface of your tooth so that the sealant will stick better. Then, the dentist will rinse the gel and dry your tooth before applying the sealant and using a blue light to harden the compound.

Sealants can be applied over

areas of early decay to prevent further damage. Some sealants are clear so that your dentist and other dental professionals can keep an eye on tooth decay that's already present.

WHO CAN GET SEALANTS?

Sealants are available for

both children and adults, but they work better in children. The first molars emerge around 66 years old.

Sealing molars as soon as they break through the gums can keep them cavity free from the start, saving you and your family time and money.

Sealants will last for several years before they need to be reapplied and are often covered by your dental insurance plans.

And remember, as great as sealants are, they are not a substitute for brushing and flossing.

Dental Care and COVID-19

The need for good oral health practices didn't take a break for the COVID-19 pandemic.

There may be few things, however, that are different as your oral health professionals take precautions against the pandemic.

BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

The American Dental Association's guidelines help dentists and other oral health professionals control infections both amongst their staff and their patients. And it's working. A June 2021 study showed that monthly infection rates for dentists were as low as 0.2%.

To help make sure their patients are healthy, your dentist may call and ask you some questions before your appointment. These will cover your general health and possibly your vaccination status. You may also be asked to limit the number of people you bring with you to your appointment, meaning your children may have to stay at home or wait in the car.

AT YOUR APPOINTMENT

Bring a mask to your appointment, especially if your state or local government is requiring people to wear masks in public. Some areas are only requiring it for medical practices and, in other



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places, each business — and your dentist's office is a business — has their own requirements. It's best to be prepared.

You may be asked to wait outside or in your car until the staff is ready for you, reducing the number of people in the office and the time that you're close to other people.

You may have your temperature taken and you may be offered hand sanitizer or the opportunity to wash your hands. You may also notice staff cleaning and wiping down surfaces more than usual, and there could be more protective equipment present. Some dental instruments may be

switched to disposable items that can be thrown away instead of reused.

AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

The staff will thoroughly clean areas to prepare for the next patient. They may start doing this while you're still

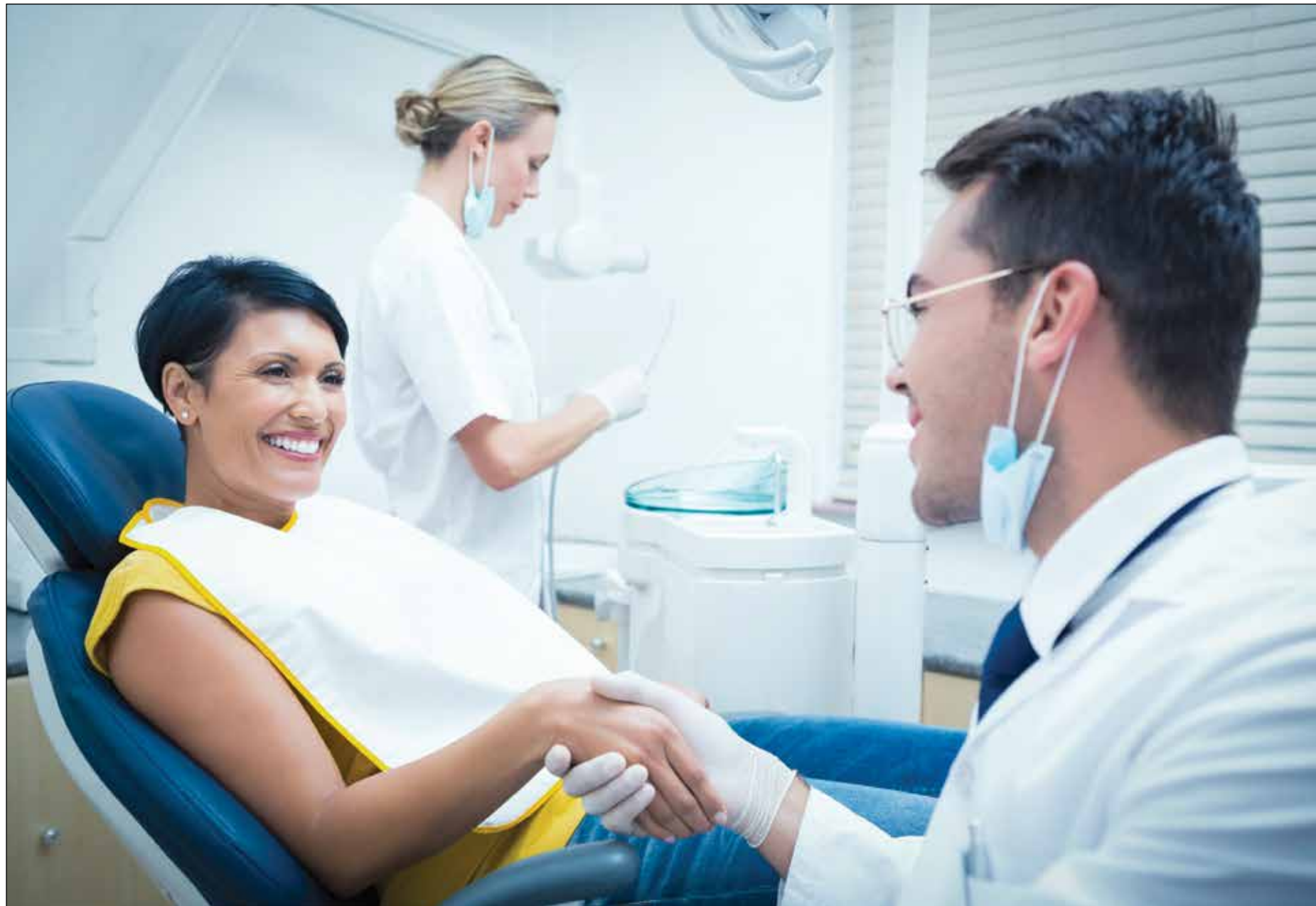
waiting to leave or check out. If you start feeling ill or test positive for COVID-19 after your appointment, call the dental office even if you've been vaccinated. You may have been carrying the virus when you visited, so anyone you came in contact with should be notified.

Choosing a Dentist

Visiting the dentist can be nerve wracking. A study published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes for Health found that more than a third of Americans experience some kind of dental anxiety.

A case of the nerves shouldn't be a reason to skip the dentist's chair, though.

"Your dental health is such a vital part of your overall health, so it's important for every patient to have a dental home," Dr. Cathy Taylor-Osborne, a dentist and director of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's Bureau of Oral Health, told the American Dental Association. "That means there is always someone looking out for the best interest of you and your family."



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THINGS TO CONSIDER

You can battle dental anxiety by making sure you're comfortable with your dental practice. Some questions to consider when choosing a dentist include:

- Is the office easy to get to? Do they have convenient office hours?
- Is this dentist in your insurance network?
- Is the dentist a member of the ADA or any other profes-

sional organizations?

- Will the dentist explain ways to help you prevent dental health problems?
- How does the office handle emergencies outside of office hours?
- Is the office staff familiar with your benefits plan and do they offer other financial options for treatment costs?

TOOLS FOR YOUR SEARCH

The ADA has an online

Find-A-Dentist tool that allows you to search for a dentist by name, location and specialty.

Your local dental society can also give you recommendations, and, of course, you should ask your friends and relatives in the area. If you don't have dental benefits or can't afford dental services, your local health department or dental schools can help you find care, the ADA says. So

don't be afraid to reach out.

FINDING THE RIGHT DENTIST

Most dental offices allow you to schedule a consultation with the dentist before you have any work done. Make a list of questions to bring with you and bring your health records with you so that the dentist can take a look at your history.

You should share any concerns or anxiety you have

about visiting the dentist. With so many Americans experiencing anxiety, chances are your dentist will have a way to help you cope.

"So much of your dental health can impact your overall health," Dr. Taylor-Osborne said. "Look for someone who can be a coach to motivate you, a trusted adviser to turn to when health issues arise and a partner to make dental care decisions with."

Senior Dental Care

As we age, the American Dental Association says we enter a second round of cavity-prone years (the first being when we were children).

Some of the reasons you could be experiencing more cavities late in life is dry mouth, which is a side effect in more than 500 medications. You may also be more prone to gum disease and mouth cancers as you age, too.

DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth isn't a normal part of aging, but as we age, we tend to make more medications that can cause dry mouth. Some tips to fight dry mouth from the ADA:

- Use oral moisturizers such as sprays and mouthwashes.
- Drink more water and don't wait until you're thirsty to drink.
- Use sugar-free gum or lozenges to stimulate saliva production.
- Use a humidifier in your home to keep moisture in the air.
- Avoid foods and beverages that irritate dry mouths, including coffee, alcohol, carbonated soft drinks and acidic fruit juices.

GUM DISEASE

Gum disease, also called periodontal disease, is caused by the bacteria in plaque.



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These bacteria irritate the gums, making them swollen, red and more likely to bleed. It can be difficult to catch gum disease in its earlier stages, the ADA says, because it's a painless condition until well advanced.

Untreated gum disease can cause the gums to pull away from the teeth and form pockets where food particles and plaque collect. Eventually,

gum disease can destroy the gums, bone and ligaments supporting your teeth, leading to tooth loss.

ORAL CANCER

The American Cancer Society says there are about 35,000 cases of mouth, throat and tongue cancer diagnosed each year. The average age of people diagnosed with these cancers is 62. During regular

dental visits, your dentist will check for signs of oral cancer, which include open sores, white or reddish patches, and changes in your mouth that last for more than two weeks. Early detection of oral cancer saves lives, so it's important to get regular dental checkups.

DENTAL COVERAGE

Medicare doesn't cover routine dental care, the ADA says,

so you should begin planning for your dental expenses before you retire. Organizations like the AARP and others offer supplemental dental plans for their members to get coverage. You can also look at discount dental plans that have a lower monthly fee than traditional insurance or look into low- or no-cost dental care in your area through teaching clinics.