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It doesn't hurt...why can't I wait?

If nothing hurts, why would you "fix" it? I completely understand that rationale, because common sense says that if there isn't a problem, there is no need to address it. The problem is that this rationale **DOESN'T** work in the medical and dental worlds. In the early stages of cancer, nothing hurts. In the initial stages of a cavity, it doesn't hurt. Gum disease, doesn't hurt, until it has progressed into more severe stage... and then it can be too late. Ask my brother-in-law if he has any regrets on his recent decision to "wait" on dental work I recommended (even family doesn't follow good dental advice!). Many Americans don't see the dentist unless something is wrong, and 56 percent of those without dental insurance skip preventive treatment altogether. Their reasons for delaying or forgoing care: high costs, fear, no symptoms, and perceived lack of urgency. But like postponing health care, neglecting oral health could be a costly exercise in denial. Finances aside, people don't

realize that waiting too long also reduces options and may result in the loss of a tooth or several teeth.

Cost of "Reactive" Care

You could be the most dedicated brusher and flosser and still have dental problems if you go years without seeing a professional. These problems can build up over time and leave you with a dental emergency that will actually cost you financially and emotionally in the long run. Furthermore, despite consistent dental cleanings and exams with your dentist, if you continue to procrastinate on recommended dental work, you could find yourself in the same emergency situation.

I've seen patients with excellent home dental care develop severe gum disease because their tartar had built up for years, causing gingivitis and gum disease. I have also had patients that get their teeth cleaned regularly, but ignore their dentist's recommendations to address failing fillings, fractured crowns, or other necessary work. Just because it isn't hurting you or falling out of your mouth, does not mean it isn't failing. With a combination of photos, education, and trust, you should be following your dentist's suggestions and their recommended dental work or you are knowingly compromising your oral health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that more than 27 percent of U.S. adults ages 20 to 44 have untreated cavities. Minor cavities can turn into major problems, and what would have required a filling can eventually require a root canal or extraction. Regular exams can uncover small problems before they grow in both size and cost.

When a patient comes in reporting pain, since they just noticed it, they're thinking it's early on and probably no big deal. But when a dentist hears a patient



Dentally Speaking by Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S.

complaining that they feel something, we already start to wonder if it's a root canal or extraction type of problem. Cavities identified early can be easily fixed with a filling. When a cavity goes undetected, it's less likely that a filling will suf-

fice. Fillings are relatively inexpensive, but crowns, root canals, and dental implants are significant investments that could be avoided if issues are addressed early enough. In addition to financial costs, there's pain and often, embarrassment that comes with dental problems. Few pains are as brutal as a toothache, and few imperfections make you more self-conscious than missing teeth.

Don't make this mistake...

I understand that time, fear, and money can get in the way of having dentistry performed. But what people fail to realize is that certain dental options cease to exist when a problem progresses, and even if the solution is still there, it's more expensive than it was before. Trust your dentist. If your dental provider is identifying an issue, then it is something that should be addressed in the very near future, or it could become a much bigger problem. Don't take the chance of waiting too long... I promise that you will regret it.

Jeffrey S. Haddad, D.D.S., of Doolin & Haddad Advanced Dentistry, completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies.

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