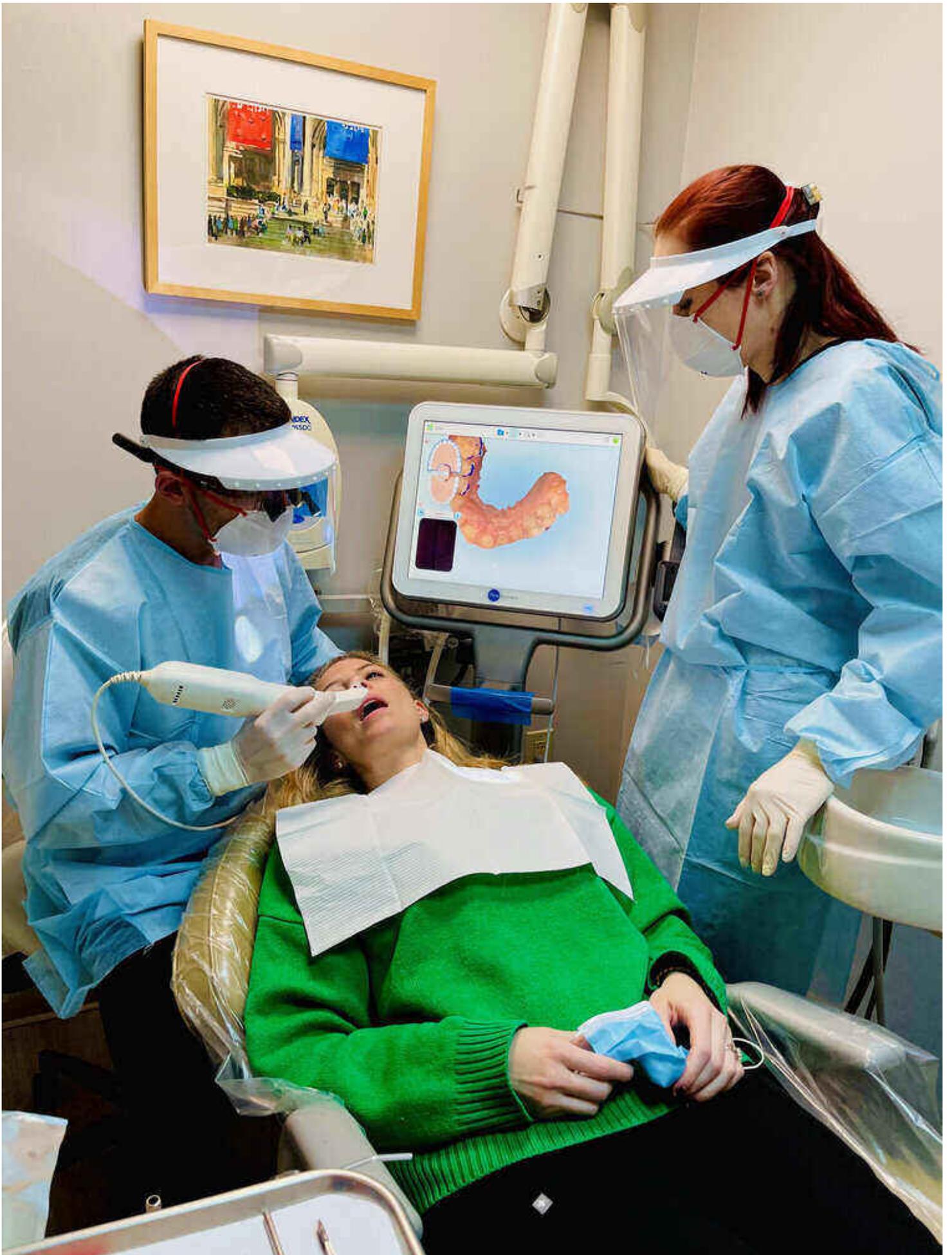


Modern Wellness Weekly

Putting an Effort into Dental Hygiene

By Lisa Iannucci
CTW Features



Have you put off going to the dentist or missed your appointments because of the pandemic, money, or other reasons? Do you have a twinge in your tooth that needs attention? Are you stress biting on pencils or your fingernails? It's time to take charge of your dental health because if you don't it can lead to serious dental issues and possible gum disease.

October is National Dental Hygiene Month, which not only celebrates the work that dental hygienists do but helps to increase awareness of the importance of good oral health. It's a good reminder, if you needed one, that your teeth need the extra care that you might not have been giving them.

"We are seeing many more new patients than before and old patients who didn't or couldn't keep appointments over the last year, so now, it's just about getting people back to baseline," said Dr. Andrew A. Geller, a general dentist and Fellow of the International Congress of Oral Implantology (FICOI) at Geller Family Dental in Yonkers, New York.

Even if you're not having any problems right now, it's important to get in to see your dentist if you've been away. "Preventative care is always a good reason to visit the dentist," said Dr. Umang Patel, a Chicagoland dentist with Romeoville Dental Center and Palos Heights Family Dental, "That's how we avoid some issues like cavities altogether and stop others in their tracks. Regular cleanings, plaque removal, X-rays, and careful oral examination by the dentist are all essential oral hygiene practices that we highly recommend you maintain when possible."

But is it safe to go to the dentist now, especially since Covid-19 cases are rising again in some areas? Yes. "We address your concerns the same way we addressed them right when we opened up from lockdown," said Geller. "Even though certain protocols might not be mandated, we still follow them because we have to cater to the most anxious patients and I don't know what their comfort level is until I speak to them," said Dr. Geller, whose office, like most, is conducting such safe practices as wearing PPE equipment, taking temperature checks and socially distancing the patients.

Getting in to see the dentist is the first start to better oral hygiene. There are other things you can do at home to make sure you're on the right track. "Everyone knows about brushing and flossing, but I'm a big fan of the Waterpik," said Dr. Geller. "No matter how many patients tell me that they're flossing, most of them are not or, if they are, they're not flossing properly or not flossing regularly."

Geller explains that when you brush your teeth, you're really only cleaning about 60% of the tooth surface so you're leaving behind a lot of stuff in between the teeth. "If you're not flossing the Waterpik is a good alternative because it sprays water in between the teeth and removes any food debris and bacteria that gets stuck," he said. "It's great for periodontal health and for preventing cavities and bad breath."

Here are some other tips you can use to not only keep your smile looking great, but also to prevent serious dental issues down the road:

Stop the sticky: "Foods that are high in sugar are going to cause more cavities," said Dr. Geller. "A sticky sugary food is really the worst because you have sugary food that's going to actually stick to your teeth as opposed to something that might brush off or wash off."

Improve your diet: "Any dairy foods that are high in calcium and phosphates can help strengthen your teeth because they have minerals that help build tooth enamel," said Dr. Patel. "Tooth enamel keeps your teeth healthy and protects them from other foods that you eat that might not be so healthy." He also suggests salmon, which is rich in Omega-3s, Vitamin D and calcium, and spinach, a superfood high in calcium with nutrients like folic acid that can help protect your gums."

Put the pencils away: If you're grinding your teeth, biting on pencils or pen caps, or even your fingernails because you're stressed, try to stop. "Those are parafunctional habits, a habit that does not help your teeth," said Dr. Geller. "You're using your teeth for a function that they're not designed to be used for and you can start fracturing your teeth and causing a breakdown of the tooth structure at the gum line or a recession of the gum. The root of the problem is stress so try to reduce yours or consider a nightguard to create a barrier for your teeth."

See your dentist every six months: “The best practice for taking care of your teeth is to see your dentist every six months,” said Dr. Patel. “This keeps you on track and helps avoid skipped or last-minute appointments.

Do not ignore pain: “If you are experiencing pain, a chipped or broken tooth, or suspect an infection, you really need to come in to have it taken care of,” said Patel. “Urgent situations like this one were always essential, and now that most dentists across the U.S. are back into a regular routine, there’s no reason whatsoever to hesitate. Don’t hold off on your appointment - it’s important to come in so the dentist can help you to feel better.

For other tips on dental care and dental health, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/adult-oral-health/tips.html>.

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