

## 'It's only teeth'... or is it?

At times it looks like both the general population and the dental profession underestimate the importance of teeth as a human organ. It is puzzling to see how patients agree to have a tooth pulled and will not even question why. What if the patient had been advised to remove one of their fingers? Would that go unquestioned and be considered 'natural' aging? Probably not. So why does this happen too often when it comes to tooth loss? Throughout history, people have accepted that it is natural to lose teeth with time or age. For some reason, even now, we as dental professionals do not contradict them often enough. This attitude is a problem which not only makes them (and us) less hesitant to extract teeth, it also does not encourage us to investigate the causes of tooth loss in order to prevent future disease and further loss.

Additionally, chronic or recurrent disease in the oral cavity is also considered more acceptable than in other places in the body. Would patients stay calm if their palms bled every time they washed their hands? Most probably not. They would undoubtedly seek medical help sooner than later in order to cure their disease and make sure their skin is intact and does not bleed. This often does not happen when we see bleeding gums. It is sometimes mistakenly considered standard or common and to not warrant treatment. The same is true for new caries lesions that are detected every few months. Patients will have them treated and move on without asking themselves why it happens repeatedly.

It should be our responsibility as the dental community to uproot these false notions. We have to educate our patients and the general population that with proper preventive measures and education, there is almost no reason to lose teeth. We need to ensure they understand that chronic inflammation in the oral cavity is far from being normal and needs to be addressed and reversed. Today,

more than ever, when we know so much about the relationships between oral and systemic health, neglecting this aspect of our patients' well-being is unforgivable. Moreover, we are today well aware of the great influence of oral disease on the overall quality of life as well as how complicated and expensive it can be to restore lost teeth or soft and hard tissues in the oral cavity.

We must urge the general population to stop thinking about teeth as disposable parts but instead see their teeth as an essential part of the human body – another organ that they would usually fight to save and work hard to preserve and keep healthy. It is our obligation to promulgate and reinforce this in the general population, our medical colleagues and ourselves. This will eventually lead to a paradigm shift in the way we and the population at large think about oral health, and will contribute to improved oral health, quality of life and general well-being.



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