

Back to basics

You don't have to reinvent the wheel to accelerate your standard of care.

by Tricia Osuna, RDH

Dental problems are not isolated from general health issues. Rather, as has become increasingly clear over the past decade, they represent just one aspect of our patients' overall wellness. As dental professionals we have an obligation to advise those who come into our offices not only on treatment for their dental problems but on general health issues as well. With the release of the "Oral Health in America" report in 2000, dental professionals were encouraged to see the mouth as a reflection of a patient's overall health, medications, harmful habits, and nutritional status.^{1,2}

While this affords us a great opportunity to offer guidance, it also means that we have a much greater responsibility than ever before to educate ourselves on health issues that go far beyond what we've been formally trained to deal with. In addition, we need to recognize that our patients often rely on us to provide them with detailed guidance on even the most seemingly routine of oral healthcare procedures. I'd like to discuss some of the issues associated with expanded responsibilities into areas such as nutrition, while at the same time re-emphasizing how important advice on basic matters can be to our clients.

ROUTINE CARE

As dental health professionals, we are trained to recognize and assess areas of disease as well as areas that may present as changes from what we normally expect. Given our education and training, we often base home-treatment recommendations on assumptions that are obvious to us but not so obvious to patients.

For example, while we're often led, through our research, to try new products and evaluate new protocols, we should never forget the basics—including daily nutrition, the need for regular and frequent brushing, and the use of mouth rinse and floss adjuncts.

When it comes to these basics, there are times when we assume patients just do it, without discussing exactly what they are really doing. I can still remember the first time a patient said she did not brush daily because, in her words, "You did not tell me to!" I was stunned. What I realized was



that if we ignore what we think of as "the obvious," we often miss the fact that our clients have no idea how to choose the correct toothbrush, floss, or toothpaste.

ADJUNCTS TO CARE

Due to the influx of innovations based on advanced research, coupled with our personal experience, we now have more adjuncts than ever with which to provide optimal care to our patients. Here are some examples.

Power toothbrush. When we recommend oral hygiene products such as the Sonicare FlexCare power toothbrush, we can rest assured that there is substantial research available to us and our patients that supports this product, its relation to periodontal health, and the reasoning behind our choice. In this case, the technology in FlexCare is proven to remove more plaque/biofilm in hard-to-reach areas, posterior teeth, interproximal spaces, and along the gumline, leading to a healthier oral environment. We also know that the brush head is gentle on the dentin and covers more surface area, which benefits all patients.

When recommending such a product, we need to evaluate our patients' attitudes about it as well as their ability to follow a regimen of daily brushing.

Perio tool/antibiotic. Another routine product we use for a successful outcome of the therapy we provide is Arestin®. This locally administered antibiotic is used as an adjunct to scaling and root planing procedures for the reduction of pocket depth in patients with periodontitis. This one product

Simple tips for every patient

Don't ever assume your patients are doing the right thing. Check in and make sure they're laying the right foundation for oral health, including:

- * Daily nutrition
- * Regular and frequent brushing
- * Proper use of mouth rinse and floss
- * Regular dental hygiene visits

has changed treatment for our patients and offered a researched-based, medicinal approach to dental hygiene care. With it, we are able to offer a possible hopeful alternative to periodontal surgery.

Following our scaling and root planing, we lay the groundwork for health in the periodontal pocket by placing Arestin® in the area where we have removed debris and bacteria knowing that, despite our efforts, it remains an unhealthy site. With this tool, we are able to guide the patient to improved periodontal health.

Vitamins. Another topic that is often neglected is basic nutrition. For example, the subject of daily vitamin intake is one we may neglect to discuss with our patients because of lack of time, due to tight scheduling, or lack of current information. I've recently made it a point to conduct discussions about nutrition with several of my patients, and I've been amazed at their lack of information regarding how to stay healthy using basic tools, such as vitamins, in their daily lives. Given that, I wasn't surprised that they were also unaware of how sound nutritional practices promote oral health leading to improved overall health.

It's increasingly become our responsibility to make sure our patients are following the right basic oral healthcare protocols, while at the same time, making them aware that there is a high correlation between good dental health and improved overall health. Sound practices in one area promote health in the other.

Research shows us, for example, that several keys to our therapy's success are directly related to the body's nutrient levels and total health. When these nutrient levels are kept as close to their optimum levels as possible, they are an important factor in maintaining periodontal health. And with the direct correlation to other systemic disease conditions, we can now see the importance of daily nutrient intake for overall health. But even though we, as health care providers, have access to information in numerous publications and ads, we may be at a loss as to what materials and research are available to us to support nutritional recommendations to our patients.

Supplements. While discussing product

recommendations with other dental professionals, I often hear such responses as, "Where is the research?" and "Prove it to me!" In addition to research, I've found that personal experience and informed opinion often can be very effective in communicating with our clients. We have access to products for recommendation to assist in overall total health by promoting dental health with the use of dental specific vitamin and mineral supplements such as Dentaplex®.

Dentaplex® offers the body the nutrients needed to produce collagen, which aids in tissue attachment and is essential for the supportive structures in the alveolar process. This supplement is recommended for use on a daily basis for perio patients, post-surgical patients, orthodontic patients as well as for patients who are pre- and post-menopausal, smokers, patients suffering from alcohol abuse, have liver and kidney insufficiency issues and have other habits which cause deficiencies of much needed nutrients for oral health. It also assists in the repair of connective tissue after injury from plaque and calculus. Key nutrients also aid the periodontal tissues and structures in resisting infection, and they strengthen and maintain natural barriers and repair damaged gingiva.

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Nutritional guidance along with product recommendations should be one of our main goals in our attempt to lay the foundation and provide optimal oral healthcare for our patients. Let's make sure we tell our clients to get down to the basics as we know them: proper use of toothbrush, toothpaste, and mouth rinse; regular dental hygiene visits; and an appropriate daily supplement. It's the formula for healthier patients through understanding that oral health and optimal general health go hand in hand. [mh](#)

Tricia Osuna, RDH, BS, is an educator, lecturer, and product evaluator. Her company, Professional Insights, provides consulting services, educational programs and market research evaluations.

References available upon request.
E-mail mh@advanstar.com.

From the page to the patient...

Now that you've read about them, put these products to use

ORAPHARMA

Arestin

Arestin contains "Micro-spheres"—tiny, bead-like particles smaller than grains of sand—filled with the antibiotic minocycline. They release the drug over time into the infected periodontal pocket, killing bacteria that live there for up to 21 days. Visit arestin.com.



MEDINICHE

Dentaplex

Dentaplex is a professionally recommended nutritional supplement designed to help promote healthy teeth and gums. It is formulated to help patients obtain the nutrients they need for proper growth, protection, and overall health of oral structures and tissues. Visit mediniche.com/dentaplex.html.

PHILIPS SONICARE

FlexCare

FlexCare offers 80% less vibration in the handle, is 30% smaller and 16% lighter than its predecessor, the Elite. It has three brushing modes, including the new sensitive mode. The integrated sanitizer kills 99% of bacteria that can form on the brush head. Visit sonicare.com.

