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Jean West Medical Breakthroughs

Three new early-cavity detection tools minimize drilling

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by Jean West

If you cringe at the mere thought of going to the dentist, three new early cavity detection tools are now available. They can help dentists minimize, even avoid, the need for drilling away tooth decay.

"Because of hidden decay, you can go through your life without noticing any cavities until it's really damaged the tooth," said Dr. Ramin Tabib, D.D.S.

The Diagnodent device uses a laser to illuminate, or fluoresce the tooth.

"If it's a healthy tooth, the tooth does not fluoresce. But if it's a tooth with a decay, it fluoresces. And that fluorescence comes back through the unit with a number," said Dr. Tabib.

And the higher the number, the greater the decay. another tool now available is the Difoti fiber-optic digital imaging system.

"It sends a safe light through the tooth... illuminates the whole tooth, and areas that are decayed, the light does not penetrate well through it, and it shows up on the computer screen," said Dr. Tabib.

Last but not least, the cavity risk test, or CRT. It measures the patient's saliva production and uses samples to measure levels of two cavity-causing bacteria.

"The saliva's actually put on a culture dish and the culture dish is specific for these two bacteria that can cause the cavities," said Dr. Tabib.

High levels, along with low saliva production, may signal the need for cavity counter measures to prevent problems down the road and help reverse the ones already in progress.

"Sealants are placed in certain areas where cavities are not formed yet, but they're in great risk of forming at some point," said Dr. Tabib.

New, high-tech tools that are worth smiling about.

Other new cavity-fighters include fluoride varnishes and long lasting, bacteria-busting rinses. These new dental tools can reveal cavities before they show up on dental Xrays. And unlike X-rays, they do not expose patients to any radiation. But, experts say, they should not replace X-rays as part of a complete dental exam.

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