

# 'word of mouth'

Issue 7

## Dental implants

Implants are amazingly natural looking replacements that feel as strong and comfortable as your own teeth. They not only restore the patient's normal appearance but make eating and speaking much easier than with dentures.

Dental implants replace the tooth's own root, allowing a false tooth to be anchored permanently into the jaw – just like natural teeth. The implant itself is a titanium post inserted into the gum. Left in place for two to eight months, the bone around the implant gradually grows and bonds with the implant, holding it securely in place. Once in position, an implant can hold a single replacement tooth, a bridge or a denture with several replacement teeth. The real benefit is that they are virtually indistinguishable from your

own teeth, which means you can enjoy an attractive and natural looking smile once more.

We use implants from Nobel Biocare™, the world leader in innovative and realistic-looking implants, crowns and other dental solutions. Using such a prestigious company means we can be sure that we are providing our patients with the best possible products, which means you will be happy with the results.

Our principal dentist Ralph Palmer Gilhooly has been placing implants for over 10 years and has worked at an implant teaching centre. All this experience makes Ralph the ideal choice if you want to have implants fitted. *To discuss whether an implant may be right for you, please call to arrange a suitable appointment.*

## Setting the foundations for a healthy smile



Taking good care of your children's teeth from an early age is vital if you want to help them to smile with confidence for life.

From the moment they start to appear, your children's teeth are just as susceptible to decay and other problems as your own teeth are. Even though their first 'baby' teeth are later replaced, they still have a huge effect on your child's future smile.

For babies, the key steps to avoiding problems in the future are to only offer milk and water when using a bottle, never juice or squash, and to start cleaning your child's teeth twice a day as soon as they start to come through.

Initially, you can use a children's toothbrush with a tiny amount of children's toothpaste – you may find it easier to stand or sit behind your child so you can reach their top and bottom teeth more easily. Brush gently in small circular movements and remember to brush behind the teeth and along the gumline. Even when your child can clean their own teeth, you should continue to supervise them until they are at least seven years old.

Seeing a dentist regularly is important for your child. You should start to bring your child with you to appointments even before their own teeth appear, so they can get used to the sights, smells and sounds of the practice.

Once they have their own teeth, they should have regular check-ups – we will advise you on how often these should be. These will be fairly informal, but enable us to keep a close eye on how your child's teeth are developing.

Last but certainly not least, discourage your child from eating sugary snacks and drinking sweet and/or fizzy drinks in between meals – frequent consumption of these is the main cause of tooth decay and acid erosion.

*For more information please ask us – we'll be happy to help.*

# How many teeth do you have?



As dentists we often see patients with missing teeth who need advice on how to replace them, but occasionally we may see patients who have the opposite problem – extra teeth.

These 'supernumerary' teeth tend to be a genetic trait, and are not very common. Usually it will be just one or two extra teeth, but there have been very rare cases where patients have had as many as 50 teeth altogether! (The normal figure is 32 including the four wisdom teeth).

Extra teeth most commonly appear between the upper two front teeth or in the wisdom tooth area. Sometimes they will come through (erupt), but sometimes they remain lying under the gum. They may look like normal teeth, or may be mis-shapen – for example, extra teeth appearing between the two front teeth are often conical in shape.

They can cause a number of problems for the patient. The extra teeth can make the mouth overcrowded, which can make it difficult to clean the teeth and gums properly and can lead to tooth decay or gum disease. They can also delay eruption of other nearby teeth.

Usually such extra teeth are detected while the patient is still a child, and in most cases we will remove them, and advise whether any orthodontic (tooth straightening) work is required.

Occasionally we also see people who have the opposite problem, ie there are some teeth which simply never appear, leaving gaps. Most commonly this affects an upper front tooth and/or wisdom teeth, but in rare cases it can result in many missing teeth.

*If you are concerned about any aspect of tooth development in you or your child, please speak to us – we'll be happy to help.*

## Mouth cancer

Did you know that visiting the dentist could save your life? The reason is simple – part of our examination process is to check for signs of oral cancer, and early diagnosis can make all the difference between life and death.

Around 4,400 new cases of mouth cancer are diagnosed in the UK each year, and these figures are on the increase. Early diagnosis can improve your chances of survival from 50% to nearer 90%.

Those aged over 40 are most at risk, especially if they smoke. Drinking alcohol is also a contributory factor, and if you smoke and drink to excess at the same time (for example during an evening at the pub) you are up to 30 times more likely to develop the disease.

Early symptoms include mouth ulcers that don't heal, white or red patches, or any other unusual changes in your mouth. If you notice any of these, it is important to get them checked out as soon as possible.



During your regular examination, we always look for signs of anything suspicious in your mouth and throat. If we do spot any potential problems, we will let you know immediately and advise you to see an oral surgeon.

*For more information, please ask us or visit [www.mouthcancer.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org) or [www.mouthcancerfoundation.org](http://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org)*

## Did you Know?

Only your lower jaw moves when you chew – your upper jaw stays still. Try it for yourself!

# What's your smile style?



Of the billions of smiles that happen across the world each day, all of them follow just three basic smile patterns – an astonishing fact which most cosmetic dentists take for granted, using it for their work each day.

For the three different smile patterns show different areas of the mouth, which means they can help to determine the best way of enhancing a smile. As well as helping cosmetic dentists, the patterns are also useful for orthodontists (who specialise in tooth straightening) and specialists who are dealing with traumatic tooth fractures and complicated oral facial surgery.

The most common type of smile is known as the 'commissure' smile, where the corners of the mouth go up and out, and the upper lip draws back to show the upper teeth. Famous personalities with this type of smile include Jennifer Aniston, Frank Sinatra, Jamie Lee Curtis and Audrey Hepburn.

Elvis probably has the best known 'cuspid' type of smile, which is found in just under one third of the population. If you look at his smile, together with those of Tom Cruise, Drew Barrymore, Linda Evangelista and Tiger Woods, you will see that the corners of their mouths do not rise much, and are usually lower than the centre of the top lip.

The remaining two per cent of the population share their smile type with Julia Roberts (pictured left) and Marilyn Monroe. They have a 'complex' smile, which is characterised by the way in which, when they smile fully, the lips are almost parallel to each other, and all the teeth are shown.

*So – are you a Julia Roberts or Audrey Hepburn? Old Blue Eyes or Tom Cruise? Whichever you are, if you're not completely happy with your smile, please speak to us. We'll be happy to suggest ways in which it could be enhanced, and in most cases those enhancements can be surprisingly affordable.*

# Why sugar-free does not mean problem-free

Fans of fizzy drinks are being warned that sugar-free versions can still cause serious and permanent damage to their teeth.

The warning comes as the range of drinks with no sugar or no added sugar continues to grow.

Dr Nigel Carter, chief executive of the British Dental Health Foundation said: "The Foundation is delighted that increasing numbers of drinks companies are taking steps to make their product healthier."

"However, we are concerned that clever marketing could persuade some consumers that they can drink as many sugar free drinks as they like without suffering any consequences."

All fizzy drinks, even fizzy water, can harm the teeth if they are consumed too frequently. Each time you eat or drink anything acidic, the hard outer coating (enamel) on your teeth becomes softer for a while and loses some of its mineral content.

This damage is slowly neutralised by your saliva, but if the acid attack happens too often the saliva does not have chance to repair the damage, and over time the enamel can be destroyed.



*Dr Carter added: "We recommend that if you must drink fizzy drinks you limit them to mealtimes only to keep erosion to a minimum. However, if you can avoid them altogether then you should.*

*The only completely safe drinks for teeth and milk and still water."*

## Did you Know?

In ancient Greece, donkeys' milk was used as a mouthwash – it was believed to strengthen the gums and teeth.

# Kissing with confidence



We can often feel uncomfortable about our breath after eating curries or garlic, but some people suffer from chronic bad breath more often, even every day.

The good news is that there is plenty that can be done to help you maintain fresh breath and keep you kissing with confidence.

Odour caused by spicy foods is probably the easiest to deal with. You can either avoid the foods, or clean your teeth and use mouthwashes to mask the smell until it disappears naturally (usually within 24 hours).

Chronic bad breath (halitosis) takes a little more work, but can still be relatively easy to cure with a strict daily oral healthcare routine.

This includes brushing thoroughly twice a day, especially at bedtime, for at least two minutes and using a fluoride toothpaste. You should also clean between your teeth and underneath the gumline – we can advise you on the best ways of doing this.

Your tongue can harbour a lot of odour-causing bacteria – this can be removed by brushing your tongue clean, or you might prefer to use a tongue scraper.

You should also visit us regularly for dental check-ups and hygiene appointments. This helps to ensure that gum disease and tooth decay do not contribute to any breath problems.

Sometimes despite your best efforts you may still suffer from bad breath. This may be due to a chemical imbalance in your mouth, and often we can still help by recommending toothpastes, mouthwashes or oral sprays specifically created to combat bad breath.

*If you think that you may have a problem with breath odour, please do not be embarrassed to speak to us about it – we'll be happy to help.*

## Questions & Answers

*I really struggle when I visit the dentist because I cannot stand having dental instruments put in my mouth – they make me gag. I find this very distressing and embarrassing, and as a result have not been to the dentist for several years. Is there anything that can be done to help?*

This is a surprisingly common problem, and can affect patients in a number of different ways. For example, some may gag if an instrument touches their tongue, others may have problems when they have an impression (mould) taken. Often such problems are as a result of being nervous. In many cases, discussing your

problems with a dentist who is gentle and has a calm and reassuring manner can make all the difference. If you still feel you need an extra helping hand, there are other ways in which you can be helped, including sprays to numb the gag reflex area.



*I'm thinking of having my teeth whitened. Can I do it myself or should I get it done professionally?*

This is something we are often asked, especially with so many off-the-shelf whitening products now available. It is vital to have a word with your dentist about it to ensure a safe and effective result. The first thing we will do is ensure that your teeth are suitable for whitening, and discuss which methods are best for you. The professional whitening procedures involve a stronger whitening process than the shop-bought products, and so are far more effective. They also avoid problems that can occur when using a DIY shop-bought kit, such as patchy-looking teeth and sensitivity. Finally, we can also provide top-up kits for use at home to help keep your teeth sparkling and white.

