

## HEALTH

# Safe dental care in a post-Covid-19 world

BY PROFESSOR ANDREW EDER

**T**O SAY things have changed over the past few months might turn out to be the understatement of the century! As we continue to live through these challenging times, always learning more about how to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, there naturally remain worries about certain issues.

We in the dental profession know that one such worry is visiting your dentist and dental hygienist, not least because there was a lot of “noise” about safety in the press when dental practices were closed down in March.

To save the NHS and help to save lives, I dare say time will tell us this was a practical decision, given what we knew then about Covid-19.

The truth is that there are few places safer to visit than a dental practice – and in modern times that has always been the case.

From the receptionist all the way up to the principal dentist, every member of the team is committed to creating and working in a safe and Covid-secure environment – and that’s not new.

Over the years, we have safely steered through the arrival of new conditions

like HIV and vCJD (mad cow disease), as well as more established illnesses like hepatitis.

When dental practices reopened, it was really like we were adding a belt to our pre-existing braces.

So, what changes might you see? Certainly, nothing to worry about.

You might have an initial, remote consultation via a video platform like Zoom, and when you do attend an appointment there might be additional physical barriers in place and new types of PPE.

Appointments may be longer than normal, you could be asked to wait in your car until called and you may be taken through the practice via a one-way system, with hand sanitisers positioned along the way.

## TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF

It could take some time for your practice to catch up with all its patients, and it may well be dealing with those on the list whose treatment was interrupted by the shutdown first and, of course, emergencies, before recalling anyone for a routine check-up or hygiene visit.

To help keep your mouth as healthy as possible in the meantime, the general recommendation is to reduce your intake and frequency of sugary and acidic foods and drinks, to brush



Prof Andrew Eder: “Learn to brush teeth effectively, yet gently”

twice a day for at least two minutes with a fluoridated toothpaste and to clean between your teeth once a day using a device designed for the job, such as dental floss or an interdental brush.

Beyond everyday preventive measures, it has also been recognised that lockdown and general coronavirus-associated worries have affected some people’s mental health.

In terms of oral health, this could manifest as an eating disorder and, for instance, bulimia-induced vomiting

increases the acid in the mouth, while a surge in stress can lead to tooth grinding, especially when asleep.

Over a long period, both of these can damage the teeth, wearing away the outer surfaces. You might notice sharp tooth edges and experience tooth sensitivity, problems chewing, headaches and neck ache.

For someone with an eating disorder, it is recommended that they avoid brushing immediately after vomiting and instead rinse with a fluoridated

mouthwash and chew sugar-free, xylitol-sweetened gum following an episode.

In addition, to help reduce stress, making a few simple lifestyle changes can be a big help, such as:

- Doing something relaxing before bed, like yoga, reading or having a bath
- Learning to brush effectively yet gently with a relatively soft toothbrush and a toothpaste that is low in abrasivity (ask your dentist for advice on this if you are not sure).
- Your dentist might also recommend the use of a mouthguard overnight.

Here to help – always!

With safety assured, it remains as important as ever to visit your dentist and dental hygienist when you can.

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*If you have concerns about tooth wear or would like preventive advice, see [toothwear.co.uk](http://toothwear.co.uk), contact the London Tooth Wear Centre® on 020 7486 7180 or email [info@toothwear.co.uk](mailto:info@toothwear.co.uk), or arrange to see your dentist or hygienist*