

Discussion Topic

Q: I'm curious about the analogies hygienists use to describe various situations to patients. For example, to describe the way gingiva reacts to calculus, it can be compared to the way your skin reacts if a splinter was left in a finger. What are the analogies you use?

—Brynne Poore, RDH, BS, Scottsbluff, Nebraska
For additional analogies, check www.amyrdh.com

A: When speaking to a denture or partial denture wearer who does not want to take them out at all, I compare it to never taking your shoes off! The tissue needs rest and air circulation to be healthy. As for flossing, I tell them that brushing and flossing cleans two separate areas of their teeth and/or mouth. Brushing without cleaning in-between teeth is like taking a shower and only washing the front side of your body!

Cappy C. Snider, RDH, Fort Worth, TX

A: When talking about how gums become infected, I explain that the gum attaches to the tooth the way the finger attaches to the fingernail, leaving a similar space where food debris lodges. When the space under the fingernail fills up, you wash your hands and most of the “stuff” comes out. If you are left with a dirty black line, you clean that out with something sharp and pointy because if you don't, you know your fingers will get sore and infected. When you eat, the pocket of gum around the tooth fills up with food debris, and when you brush your teeth most of this is cleaned away, but there is the equivalent to the black line under your fingernails left and this is what bacteria feed on, thus producing toxins that leach into the gums causing infection and, ultimately, bone loss. I tell them this is why regular professional cleanings are so important. Patients seem to relate well to the concept because they can actually “see” what you mean.

Penny Spacie, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

A: I have likened tenacious calculus to the way a barnacle is tenacious. This is great in the northwest where just about everyone has seen a barnacle. That analogy didn't work too well when I lived in Utah!

Anonymous

A: This one is good for engineers or very analytical people. Explain that there are five sides to your teeth: tongue side, cheek side, top, and left and right sides. If you do a perfect job of brushing, then you are only cleaning 3 of the 5 sides, or 60% of the tooth surface, leaving 40% of the plaque untouched. Because most of us do not brush the recommended 2 minutes, we are probably leaving 50% or more of the plaque in our mouths. This is why it is so necessary to clean between the teeth where the brush won't reach.

Sheri French, RDH, Blanchard, OK

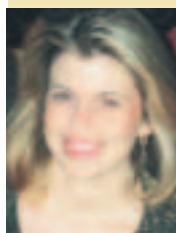
A: For gingivitis, I tell patients that leaving plaque on their gums is like leaving dirt in a cut, your body sees it as an infection, and sends extra blood there to fight the bacteria so that's why your gums swell, turn red, and bleed. Then after years of fighting the infection that will not heal, your body says, “Well, I can't get rid of this infection, so I'll just get rid of these teeth,” and it starts to resorb the bone around the roots of the teeth to make them fall out. It can take years, but once you lose bone you do not get it back—that's called periodontitis. Gingivitis is reversible, but periodontitis is not. They're both painless, so the way to tell if they exist is through radiographs, pocket depths, and bleeding gums.

Shannon Smith, Brighton, MI

A: I usually tell patients that calculus under the gumline is like a grain of sand in an oyster. Whereas the oyster coats it to make it smooth, so it won't hurt and be bothersome, our mouths cannot do that, so the calculus builds up and becomes more like a coral reef that is poking our tissue 24/7. And, the only way to get rid of it is to have a dental procedure that is called scaling and root planing. It may seem a little strange, but they tend to understand. When I see them for the recall visit, they comment on how good their mouth feels, and how good food tastes. Plus, they like the fact that their teeth look much whiter and brighter without that yellow “gunk” on them!

Sue Carr, Buffalo, NY

A: I went to a CE seminar, with two fellow hygienists. We were all chatting about patients who need to be continually reminded that they really need to floss daily. One of the hygienists had an awesome analogy, which I have used several times: Think of your teeth like the tines of a fork. If you only brush the outsides and insides of your teeth, it's like only cleaning the front and back of the fork. If you don't clean between your teeth by flossing, then you leave food debris there. The bacteria in your mouth



Amy Nieves, RDH

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attack that food and it ferments as it breaks down. This is why there is odor, bleeding, redness, etc. The fermentation process is what breaks down the structures that hold your teeth in. So, if you choose not to floss, you are leaving decaying food debris between your teeth that continues to build up. The thought of all that mess building up is pretty disgusting, huh?

Lisa Sterlace, RDH, New York

A: In my area, people constantly question the use of fluoride. I tell them if you looked at your teeth under a microscope before I cleaned them, it would look something like a sponge: full of holes from bacterial acid leaching into the enamel. After I place the fluoride, if you looked again under a microscope, it would look almost like a wall, with the holes filled in. Don't eat or drink for 30 minutes to give it a chance to solidify in the holes. Here's an analogy to use when discussing the importance of brushing and flossing before going to bed:

Bacteria is smart. It's going to go where you are less likely to remove it—between the teeth. Bacteria like to colonize, they like to build houses. During the day, they can only build houses for you to tear down because your tongue is moving around and you're drinking things, but at night, while you are asleep, they are building condos and small cities. It is harder to tear down a condo or a small city than it is to tear down a house. That's why perio patients will never have the luxury of saying that they are too tired to brush and floss before going to bed ever again. (This works with kids, too.)

Mary, RDH

A: I heard the greatest thing at a CE class presented by David A. Bresler, DDS, a pedodontist from Ft. Washington, Pa. When parents cannot get their child to give up their pacifier, try the paci-fairy. The child puts their pacifier under their pillow, and receives a prize or money—just like the tooth fairy when losing a tooth.

Angela Wilcox, RDH, Grand Rapids, MI

Next Issue's Question

One of my patients is a woman in her mid-30s who is very frustrated because she has a severe case of aphthous ulcers that are generalized on her buccal mucosa, palate, and gingiva. She had only mild cases before giving birth a year ago, after which they became severe. I am at a loss and need to find help for this patient. Her physician and dentist gave her prescription “magic” mouthwash, and reviewed her diet, which didn't seem to contain acidic or trigger foods. Does anyone have suggestions?

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