



Dental Care for a Lifetime of Smiles

by Josie Padro



For the last seven years dental hygienist Ashifa Dharamsi has taken her practice, Strictly Prevention Inc, out of the dental office and into the community. Making stops at long-term care facilities and private homes, she provides oral assessments and dental cleanings, focusing on prevention. She points out that maintaining healthy gums and teeth can be especially challenging for seniors.

As we age, our teeth age along with us and poor oral health can affect health as a whole. Teeth become more brittle, gums recede and we produce less saliva, which allows food particles and bacteria to linger and cause decay. Poor dental health is linked to heart disease, stroke, and respiratory problems. Those with dental problems who are unable to chew are at risk for progressive weakening brought on by malnutrition. Risk of oral cancers increases with age. Also, embarrassment over tooth loss and bad breath can cause seniors to withdraw from their supportive social circle.

Ms. Dharamsi advises that good oral care is the best way to prevent dental complications. **She suggests the following simple tips to help ensure teeth and gums stay healthy for a lifetime:**

- Take frequent sips of water throughout the day.
- Rinse with plain water after meals to remove any remaining food particles.

- Brush your tongue daily, as far back as you can without gagging.
- Brush your teeth twice a day, at least, with a focus on the gum line.
- Floss daily.
- Avoid using toothpicks as they can damage the gums. Instead, try using an interdental toothbrush, available at drug stores, to remove material that gets stuck between teeth.
- Eat a healthy diet. Avoid sticky sugary foods and sweet juices.
- Schedule regular appointments with your dentist and dental hygienist.

One option for anyone who finds it difficult to get to the dentist office is to make an appointment with a visiting dentist or mobile dental hygienist. Contact the BC Dental Association at 604-415-4559 or info@bcdha.bc.ca for a list of mobile dentists on the North Shore. For contact information of mobile dental hygienists, contact The BC Dental Hygienists Association at 604-415-4559 or info@bcdha.bc.ca.

For those unable to afford dental fees, there are a number of low-cost clinics in the Vancouver area. The UBC Dental School clinic, 604-822-2112, runs a general dentistry clinic. Many of the colleges that offer dental hygiene programs offer low-cost cleaning and preventive treatments. Call the institution directly for information or obtain a list of locations from the College of Dental Hygienists of BC at 1-800-778-8277. To download a copy from their site, www.cdhbc.com, go to the "Forms and Resources" tab and click on "Affordable/Lower Cost Clinics in BC."

The need for regular dental care doesn't stop at retirement. It's clear that, when it comes to our teeth, a little prevention goes a long way to preserving a healthy smile and to saving us the prospect of costly dental bills.