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THE LASTING EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON DENTAL OFFICES

Since the pandemic began, dentists have had to change how they interact with patients before, during, and after their appointments. And those changes will likely remain long after the pandemic is over. Not since the HIV/AIDS epidemic decades ago has a disease so radically altered dentists' behavior. The practice of wearing gloves and masks while working with patients is proof. Before HIV/AIDS, those protective measures were far less common.

With that in mind, it's interesting to consider which of the COVID-19 safety measures taken in dentistry will continue to be utilized as the pandemic subsides.

Changing Gowns for Each Patient

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that dentists wear disposable (or washable)



gowns that can be changed for each new patient. This is done so that any particulates that might come from one patient's mouth aren't passed to another patient, something many patients will prefer even after COVID-19 is no longer a major health concern.

Installing HEPA Air Filtration Systems

High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters trap fine particles floating in the air before they are circulated throughout indoor spaces. Since these filters can capture other virus particles besides coronaviruses, HEPA filters might be another new addition to dental offices, ensuring their chair spaces and waiting areas have a constant flow of clean air.

Finding Alternative Tools

As it turns out, some dental tools, such as drills, ultrasonic scalers, and air polishers, can produce suspended air droplets that could carry viruses, which endanger both patients and dentists. Some dentists have found ways around using these tools, though. According to The New York Times, one dentist in Seattle used silver diamine fluoride to prevent children's cavities from growing instead of using a drill.

While more people are getting vaccinated against COVID-19 every day, the virus will no doubt leave lasting effects on the dental industry and many others. Hopefully, the precautions that stick around will serve to protect dentists and patients every day, no matter if we have a health crisis or not.

MY DAD - 1, CORONAVIRUS - 0!

WHAT I LEARNED FROM WATCHING MY DAD BEAT COVID-19

This month, I want to talk about something very personal: my dad's long-term struggle with COVID-19. He was admitted to the hospital just before Halloween last year. That might seem like a long time ago, but the next six months were so tough on my family that I didn't feel able to unpack the experience until now. Fortunately, my dad was lucky! Thanks to the phenomenal nurses and doctors at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, he beat the virus and came home just after New Year's Day.

Getting that amazing result was an uphill battle. He was on a ventilator in the hospital for 40 days. The doctors weren't hopeful that he would make it. Once you're intubated, your chances of survival drop to 30%, and after two weeks, they plummet even more, so it's really a miracle that he came out alive.

While my dad was in the hospital, my family stayed in touch with him over FaceTime. Seeing him go through that experience was absolutely awful. But we weren't just there for him as family members — my sister (an anesthesiologist), my aunt Maricar (an ICU nurse), and I were also there as medical professionals. I learned a lot while watching my dad fight, and I want to share some of those takeaways with you.

The biggest thing my dad's experience reinforced for me is the connection between dental health and overall health. Inflammation in your mouth from things like periodontal disease and gingivitis can increase inflammation in your whole body, and oral bacteria can

cause aspiration pneumonia if you're intubated (which happened to my dad). This compromises your immune system, just like an unhealthy diet, mouth breathing, digestive issues, sleep apnea, poor sleep, and vitamin D deficiency (stay tuned for more on that next month). All of these things can make it harder for your body to fight a virus.

Unfortunately, my dad has several of these issues, and over the years, he has been too stubborn to let me help. He's a mouth breather, has gut inflammation, doesn't always eat well, and, like many of my patients, he has sleep apnea. That means his airway collapses at night and he has trouble breathing. To correct this, he sleeps with a CPAP machine. While he was in the hospital, he couldn't use his CPAP and the oxygen machine at the same time. That made it really tough for him to get enough oxygen into his blood while he was sleeping, so that prolonged the recovery process.

Sleep apnea and the other issues I mentioned above are problems a specially-trained dentist like me can help solve. In fact, My dad was supposed to get an oral appliance from me just weeks before his COVID-19 diagnosis, but he's stubborn about getting help and missed his appointment. If he'd been there, I'm sure it would have made his battle with the virus easier! He could have used the appliance and the oxygen at the hospital at the same time. In hindsight, I should have dragged him into the office and ignored his excuses.

If you have sleep apnea or trouble sleeping, don't make that same mistake:



After months apart while my Dad was in the hospital, my parents finally saw each other again!

Get it treated now and consider getting an oral appliance as backup, just in case! (Also, if you have to quarantine at home while using a CPAP machine, stay far away from everyone else and filter the air if you can. The machine aerosolizes the virus and makes it spread farther than 6 feet.)

It's amazing that my dad made it out alive with so many odds stacked against him, and it's even more miraculous that he's nearly back to normal. His kidneys are still fully functional, and he finally stopped using an oxygen tank in February. I credit that to his medical team, of course, but also to the people who prayed for him day and night while he was in the hospital. If you're one of them, *thank you*. Your thoughts were a huge comfort to my family.

That said, as a doctor, I know we can't rely on prayer alone. To minimize your risk of catching an illness (and boost your odds of beating it), prioritize your health now — starting with a trip to the dentist.

To your great smiles and better health,

-Dr. Michelle Weddle

DOES FLOAT THERAPY REALLY WORK?

SWIM INTO THE LATEST HOLISTIC HEALTH TREND

The tank is white, shiny, and oblong — just big enough for a human to lie down in. When you open it, eerie blue light pulses out along with steam from the water inside. A calm voice from over your shoulder tells you to step in. Would you do it?

That image probably brings to mind an alien pod from an outer space movie, but it actually describes a real-life spa treatment here on Earth: float therapy. The concept of float therapy is as simple as it sounds. You step buck naked into a sensory deprivation tank filled with a foot of heavily salted water. Then you lie down, close your eyes, and someone else shuts the lid.

You're encased in complete womb-like silence and darkness. That's when restricted environmental stimulation therapy (REST) can begin.

Dr. John Lilly, a neuroscientist studying sensory deprivation, pioneered float therapy in 1954. Today, it's



gaining traction as a popular holistic health treatment, perfect for those who prefer to unwind in isolation. The health benefits supposedly include relaxation, pain reduction, creativity, and better sleep. John Lennon, Jeff Bridges, Elle Macpherson, and even Homer and Lisa Simpson are fans — but does hanging out in a tank really live up to the hype?

In 2004, a survey of 27 studies published in the journal *Psychology & Health* found that “REST has positive effects on physiology (e.g., lower levels of cortisol, lower blood pressure), well-being, and performance.” The survey's authors called float therapy a “useful stress management tool.” More recently, a 2014 pilot study with 65 participants found that those who enjoyed 12 float therapy sessions over seven weeks experienced significantly decreased stress, depression, anxiety, and pain. They were also more optimistic and slept better than a control group of nonfloaters who had “no significant results” over seven weeks.

That particular study relied on questionnaires, so it's possible some of the benefits were due in part to a placebo effect. However, in the stressful times we're living in, even *imagined* relief might be worth the \$50-\$100 it costs for a float session. To find a float therapy site near you and judge for yourself, visit FlotationLocations.com.

THE CURE FOR 'AMERICAN GIRL DOLL TEETH'

DO YOU NEED DENTIST'S HELP?

In December 2020, the TV show “The Bachelorette” spawned a new meme. Against all odds, the joke wasn't about roses, petty arguments, face masks, or even limousines — it was about teeth! That month, a fan snarkily compared contestant Bennett Jordan's prominent front teeth to those of the “Samantha Parkinson” American Girl doll.

The fan's joke cracked up millions of viewers, possibly because the doll is such an unlikely twin for the Harvard-graduating, Rolls Royce-driving lady's man. Samantha hails from 1904 and wears a pink velvet dress, white tights, and black Mary Jane shoes. Her bangs and hair bow are iconic, but her two front teeth really define her look. They're the only visible teeth in her smile and peek out from below her top lip, making her look like a cross between an adorable bunny and Hermione Granger from “Harry Potter.”

A photo of Bennett with the same smile next to a shot of Samantha went viral. From there, the meme got out of control, inspiring Instagram reels and TikToks of people calling each other (and themselves) out on their embarrassing “American Girl Doll Teeth.”

Those jokes hit close to home for people already self-conscious about their front teeth. If the “American Girl Doll Teeth” meme is getting *you* down, don't worry — your smile

isn't a lost cause. Dentists have multiple tricks up their sleeves to minimize prominent front teeth.

Trimming — which is also known as tooth shaving, interproximal reduction, or interproximal enamel reduction — might be the best option if your teeth are oversized. Trained dentists can trim teeth using a drill or by hand. They'll shave off just enough length to make your smile look uniform without removing the crucial enamel or causing you pain. Invisalign can help if your front teeth are crooked or stick out from the rest of your smile. The procedure involves wearing clear retainers for six months or more to shift and straighten your teeth.

Both options take time and money to accomplish, but they're guaranteed to make you feel more confident in your smile. If you decide to go with one of these procedures, it won't be long before you can chuckle at the “American Girl Doll Teeth” meme, too!



BETTER WAYS TO EAT CHIPS — COURTESY OF TIKTOK

TikTok generation has a few hacks to improve the experience. Here are just a few new ways to eat chips, popularized by videos on the app.

The Classy Dipper

Are you frustrated by the lack of chip space you have left when you plop dip in the middle of your plate? @thelifebath on TikTok has the solution. Grab a martini glass and fill it with your dip of choice, then set it down in the middle of a bowl. Now when you add the chips, they can cover the base of the glass, stabilizing it and allowing for maximum chip storage.

The Staleness Solution

If you're out of binder and bag clips, never fear — there's a clip-free way to keep your half-eaten bags of chips fresh. @abrigail23 has mastered the art of folding her bags closed origami-style. To follow her lead, simply roll down the top of the bag, then fold both ends of the roll inward, tucking them under as you roll down another layer. Presto! Sealed chips.

The Bag-to-Bowl

Thanks to their tapered bottoms, most chip bags are inherently unstable. But if you don't have a couch cushion to prop your bag against (or a bowl at hand), @kennamox has your back. Once you open your chips, push the bottom of the bag up from the center and fold the pointed corners in. Then, pinch around the edges to create a concave bottom. Now your chips will stand upright, no bowl needed!

Check out Buzzfeed.com or the TikTok app for more clever hacks.

Few things are more satisfying and exciting after a long day than the *woosh* and *crackle* as you're opening a fresh bag of chips. Ah, salty bliss! Culinary legend says Americans have been eating potato chips since 1853, when the aptly named chef George Crum first popped slivered tubers into the fryer in Saratoga Springs, New York.

In reality, the provenance of the chip is unknown, but Crum's sister, Kate Wicks, may be the real genius behind it! (Read up on the controversy at ThoughtCo.com.) After all those decades of chip-eating, you may have thought we'd perfected the art, but it turns out the

TAKE A BREAK!



SHAVED ASPARAGUS SALAD

Inspired by ACoupleCooks.com

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb asparagus spears
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 3/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/8 tsp red pepper flakes
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. With a vegetable peeler, shave each asparagus spear from tip to base. This is easiest to do if the asparagus is on a flat surface.
2. Place shaved asparagus in a bowl and blot off excess moisture with a paper towel.
3. In a separate bowl, make a vinaigrette by whisking together lemon juice, Dijon mustard, and olive oil.
4. Pour vinaigrette over shaved asparagus and add Parmesan cheese, salt, red pepper flakes, and black pepper. Toss to combine. Taste and adjust seasonings.