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Prophylaxis (1973)

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Although you may be conscientious about daily brushing and flossing, stains and calculus accumulate and must be removed by a dentist or a dental hygienist. This professional treatment is called a dental prophylaxis and requires the use of special instruments.

Why Do I Need A Prophylaxis?

The main purpose of a prophylaxis is to remove the stains and calculus (tartar) from your teeth (see Figure 1). Calculus is a hard, crustlike deposit that forms at and beneath the gumline. It results from the mineralization of unremoved *plaque*, a sticky film of harmful bacteria that is constantly forming in your mouth. Once plaque has hardened into calculus, it can be removed only by a prophylaxis.

What If Calculus Is Not Removed?

If not removed, calculus collects even more plaque and leads to *periodontal (gum) disease* – *the greatest single cause of tooth loss in adults*. The disease begins as the bacterial plaque produces by-products that irritate the gums, causing them to become inflamed, tender, and likely to bleed. As the gums become more infected, they begin to move away from the teeth and form pockets that harbor more bacteria and debris. As the disease progresses, it destroys the gums and spreads to the underlying ligaments and into the jawbone. The teeth become progressively looser as their bony support is destroyed and may have to be removed. *Remember*, a periodic prophylaxis is one of the most important measures for the prevention of periodontal disease. (See Figures 2 and 3)

How Often Should I Have A Prophylaxis?

Since stains and calculus form on people's teeth at different rates, your dentist is the best judge of how often you should have a prophylaxis. Your particular needs depend, in part, on how effectively you clean your teeth and gums. The better your daily brushing and flossing, the less often you will need a prophylaxis.

Should Children Have Their Teeth Cleaned?

Yes, children, as well as adults, should have a prophylaxis at regular intervals. Although periodontal disease is more often considered a problem for adults, it is also a real threat to the oral health of youngsters. Stains and calculus can cause damage to health and appearance regardless of age.



Fig. 1 Stains present before prophylaxis

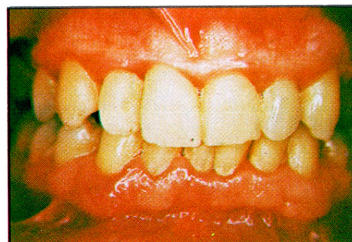


Fig. 2 Beginning gum disease

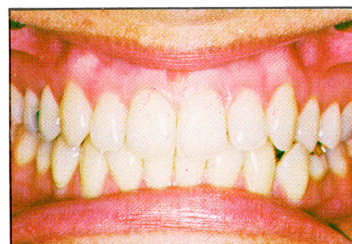


Fig. 3 Normal, healthy gums

BESIDES HELPING TO PREVENT GUM DISEASE, ARE THERE OTHER BENEFITS?

Yes. A prophylaxis can . . .

- Help the dentist make a more effective examination of your oral health.
- Often eliminate unpleasant breath caused by plaque and calculus.
- Enable you to clean your teeth and gums more effectively.
- Make your smile more attractive.

A prophylaxis is good insurance against disease which could result in serious damage to your oral health.

pro·phy·lax·is

\prō-fə-'lak-səs\ *n* [NL, fr. Gk *prophylaktikos*]:

- 1:** The prevention of disease of the mouth and teeth.
- 2:** A procedure of removing extraneous materials from tooth surfaces by scaling and polishing techniques.



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