

SMILE When You Say That



AN INFORMATIVE NEWSLETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF:
Janet M. Kuhn, D.D.S. • Jeffrey A. Kramer, D.D.S.

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Janet M. Kuhn, D.D.S.
Jeffrey A. Kramer, D.D.S.

3525 W. PETERSON AVENUE
SUITE 517
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60659
(773) 588-2100

Office Hours

Mon. 9:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m.
Tues. 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
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**Appointment and
Emergency Phone:**
(773) 588-2100

Website:
www.kramerkuhndental.com

E-mail:
kramerkuhndental@gmail.com

*At the change
of the year,
we pause to say
"thank you"
for making us
a part of your life...*

*Janet M. Kuhn, D.D.S.,
Jeffrey A. Kramer, D.D.S.,
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Partners in oral health

Regular dental examinations and cleanings are an essential piece of the oral-health puzzle. Daily oral care, including brushing thoroughly twice a day and flossing daily, provides the necessary maintenance to keep teeth healthy, but professional dental care complements good homecare with several key benefits.

Dental appointments, at least every six months or on the schedule your dentist recommends, can mean discovering decay in its earliest stages, when conservative treatment can be effective. Gum disease, the number-one cause of tooth loss in adults, can be diagnosed early, while treatment can reverse the course of the infection and save teeth.

Maintaining good oral hygiene can also mean a more attractive smile and sweeter breath. Professional cleanings can reduce staining on teeth caused by drinking tea or coffee, or tobacco use. Removal of debris between teeth means a clean mouth that tastes and smells fresh.

While saving teeth and enjoying the benefits of a clean mouth are important, another—and crucial—reason to have regular checkups is to head off oral cancer at the pass if it develops. Oral cancer is a deadly disease, but it can often be treated successfully when it is diagnosed before reaching an advanced stage.

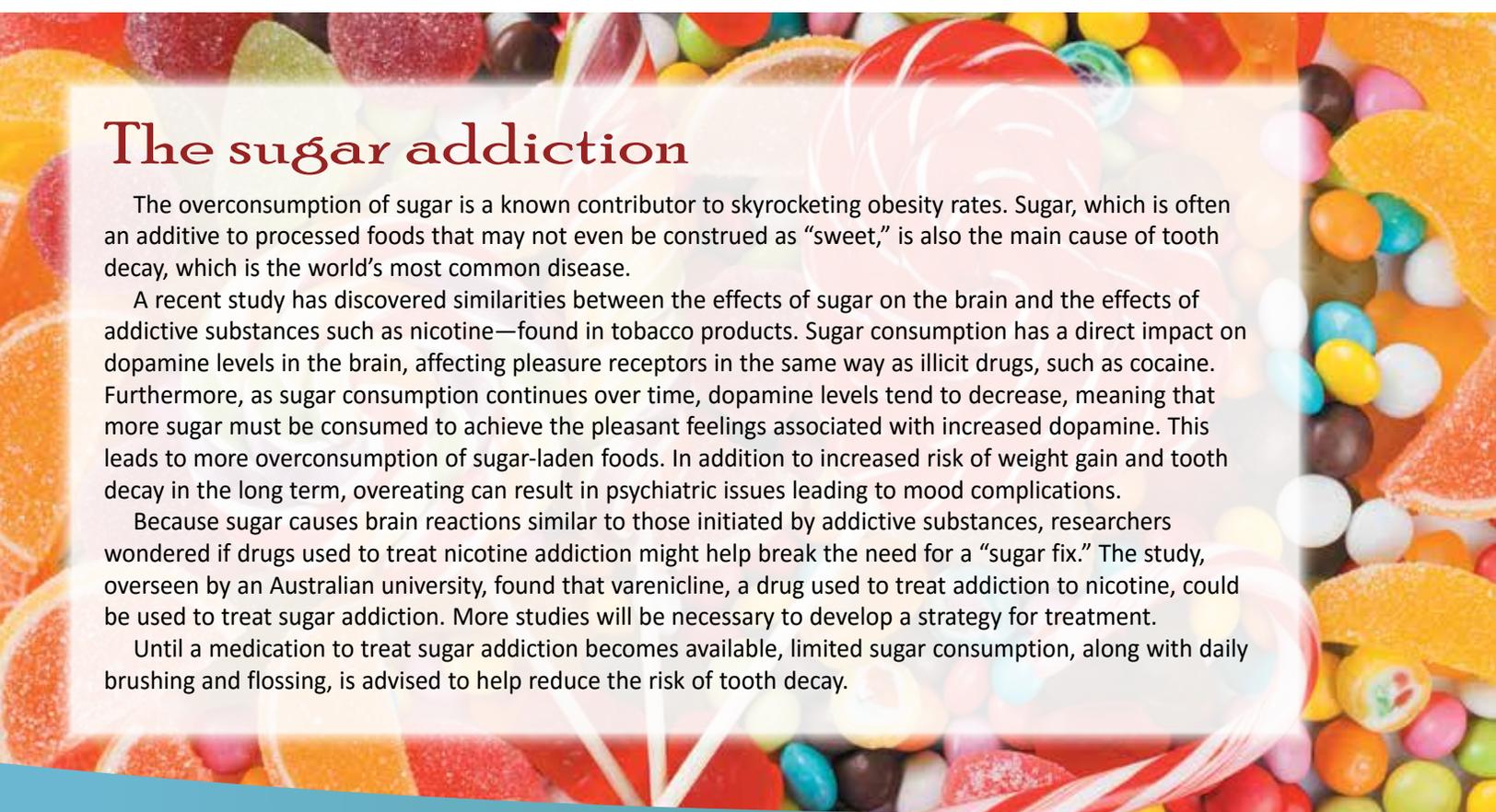
The sugar addiction

The overconsumption of sugar is a known contributor to skyrocketing obesity rates. Sugar, which is often an additive to processed foods that may not even be construed as “sweet,” is also the main cause of tooth decay, which is the world’s most common disease.

A recent study has discovered similarities between the effects of sugar on the brain and the effects of addictive substances such as nicotine—found in tobacco products. Sugar consumption has a direct impact on dopamine levels in the brain, affecting pleasure receptors in the same way as illicit drugs, such as cocaine. Furthermore, as sugar consumption continues over time, dopamine levels tend to decrease, meaning that more sugar must be consumed to achieve the pleasant feelings associated with increased dopamine. This leads to more overconsumption of sugar-laden foods. In addition to increased risk of weight gain and tooth decay in the long term, overeating can result in psychiatric issues leading to mood complications.

Because sugar causes brain reactions similar to those initiated by addictive substances, researchers wondered if drugs used to treat nicotine addiction might help break the need for a “sugar fix.” The study, overseen by an Australian university, found that varenicline, a drug used to treat addiction to nicotine, could be used to treat sugar addiction. More studies will be necessary to develop a strategy for treatment.

Until a medication to treat sugar addiction becomes available, limited sugar consumption, along with daily brushing and flossing, is advised to help reduce the risk of tooth decay.





Could a pill help prevent cavities?

Streptococcus mutans is the bacteria found in the mouth that specializes in turning sugar into lactic acid, which penetrates enamel and causes tooth decay.

A strain of streptococcus dubbed A12 can help to keep pH levels neutral, thereby lowering the acid content of the mouth to control bacteria. Compounding these bacteria into supplement form, combined with a diet low in sugar, good oral hygiene, and regular dental visits, could lead a four-pronged attack on dental decay.

Dental caries, or tooth decay, affects more than 90 percent of adults. A12 may prevent decay by breaking down two compounds found in the mouth—urea acid and arginine—to form ammonia and neutralize mouth acids.

Researchers suspected that a specific bacteria found in the mouth was responsible for this action because they realized that patients whose mouths broke down arginine were less likely to have cavities. However, they didn't know which bacteria was responsible. Identifying A12 from more than 2,000 bacteria may be the key to fighting tooth decay by adjusting pH levels.

For now, researchers plan to use what they have learned to help identify patients who have an increased risk of dental decay. Eventually, A12 might be given to patients on an as-needed basis to allow beneficial bacteria to interfere with the production of plaque and effectively lower the chances of developing cavities.

SLOW DOWN... you eat too fast!

Rushing through a meal can damage the jaw, and using your teeth to crunch hard foods such as ice or hard candies, or to break the outer shells of nuts can damage enamel that protects teeth from decay.

People who eat quickly tend to take larger bites and chew quickly. However, taking bites that are too large isn't really good for the jaw and, for people with temporomandibular disorder (TMD), opening too wide can increase discomfort associated with this issue. The fact that so many fast-food establishments offer extra-large sandwiches doesn't help the matter, because the big burgers generally encourage those who indulge to take larger bites.

Slow down. Eating slowly and taking smaller bites can make food more pleasurable and save your jaw. Chewing thoroughly also aids digestion.

Avoiding biting down on very hard foods will help prevent cavities by keeping enamel—the first line of defense against bacteria that cause decay—strong and durable.

Eating is not a race against the clock. Food is meant to be savored, and healthy teeth and a jaw that works properly can make that process more enjoyable.



How clean is that clarinet?

A study that examined the cleanliness of musical instruments—woodwind and brass instruments that are held to the mouth—used by high school band students within a week or up to a month of testing discovered hundreds of types of bacteria, along with yeast and mold, hiding in more than 100 areas of the instruments.

The findings point to the possibility that skin issues, staph infections, and even the development of asthma may be linked to improperly cleaned instruments. Because many of the bacteria identified are resistant to antibiotics, it's essential that mouthpieces be cleaned after each use and the entire instrument cleaned on a regular basis.

Areas of the instrument that touch the mouth and skin should receive special attention by being wiped frequently with disinfecting solutions made for that particular instrument. Encourage your child to talk to his or her music teacher or band director for specific instructions on sterilizing his or her instrument, and remind him or her to never share a mouthpiece with other students.





Posture and facial pain— *WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?*

Remember the old days when a high school typing or keyboarding teacher doubled as a drill sergeant when it came to posture? He or she had a point. Practicing good posture may help to ward off discomfort. Patients who experience chronic headaches and jaw and facial pain should consider that the cause might be their posture.

Poor posture, which includes hunching and slouching, or even resting your chin on your hand, can thrust the jaw forward, push the head backward, and lead to improper alignment of the upper and lower teeth. The result is discomfort in muscles and joints that is felt when the patient opens or closes the mouth.

This problem is known as temporomandibular disorder, or TMD—a potentially chronic problem with the hinge of the jaw that, left untreated, can result in an imbalance of the muscles of the face and over time can affect the way the teeth fit together when the patient bites down. Dentists are well qualified to diagnose and treat this problem because of their training and experience with the teeth and jaw. A variety of strategies, including jaw exercises and appliances, are available to help patients with TMD find relief.

Janet M. Kuhn, D.D.S.

Jeffrey A. Kramer, D.D.S.

3525 West Peterson Avenue, Suite 517
Chicago, IL 60659

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Brushing through the ages

Ever wonder about the origins of the toothbrush? Toothpaste? The toothbrush has humble beginnings, starting as a small twig with one end smashed to clean more of the tooth's surface. Initial recipes for toothpaste included ingredients that may actually have damaged teeth, including ground shells and honey.

The first bristle toothbrushes were found in China. The implements had migrated to Europe by the 17th century and were recommended to American colonists by dentists practicing there.

Advertising for electric toothbrushes appeared in the 1880s, but the first effective model appears to have been developed by the Swiss in the 1940s. By the 1960s, cordless electric toothbrushes could be found in the United States. Those early models were the prototypes for the myriad electric brushes we can choose from today.

Toothpastes advanced as well, and by the 1800s most pastes were made of cleaning agents mixed with chalk. In the mid-1950s, the first fluoride paste was introduced. The collapsible toothpaste tube appeared in 1892, and, in spite of the advent of the pump dispenser in 1984, most pastes are still delivered from a tube-type container.

