

“Not a day passes that I don’t become more aware of, and more fascinated by, the intricate balancing act that is the human body,” says Dr. Michael Willock, a well-known holistic dentist in Chapel Hill. “The human body is intricately and wonderfully designed, with the many different organs co-dependent,” he observes. “When one system isn’t working optimally, it may be that another is out of sync or balance.”

And, he continues, “I am especially aware of how one’s oral health plays a role in maintaining a healthy balance overall. It’s well established that many systemic health problems are either caused by or influenced by problems in the oral cavity—the teeth, tonsils, and sinuses.

“Oral infections, for example, can cause major health problems in other organs. That’s because the bloodstream that moves through the mouth eventually travels throughout the whole body. So, if you have an infection anywhere in the mouth, the bloodstream will carry that infection everywhere. It’s that simple.

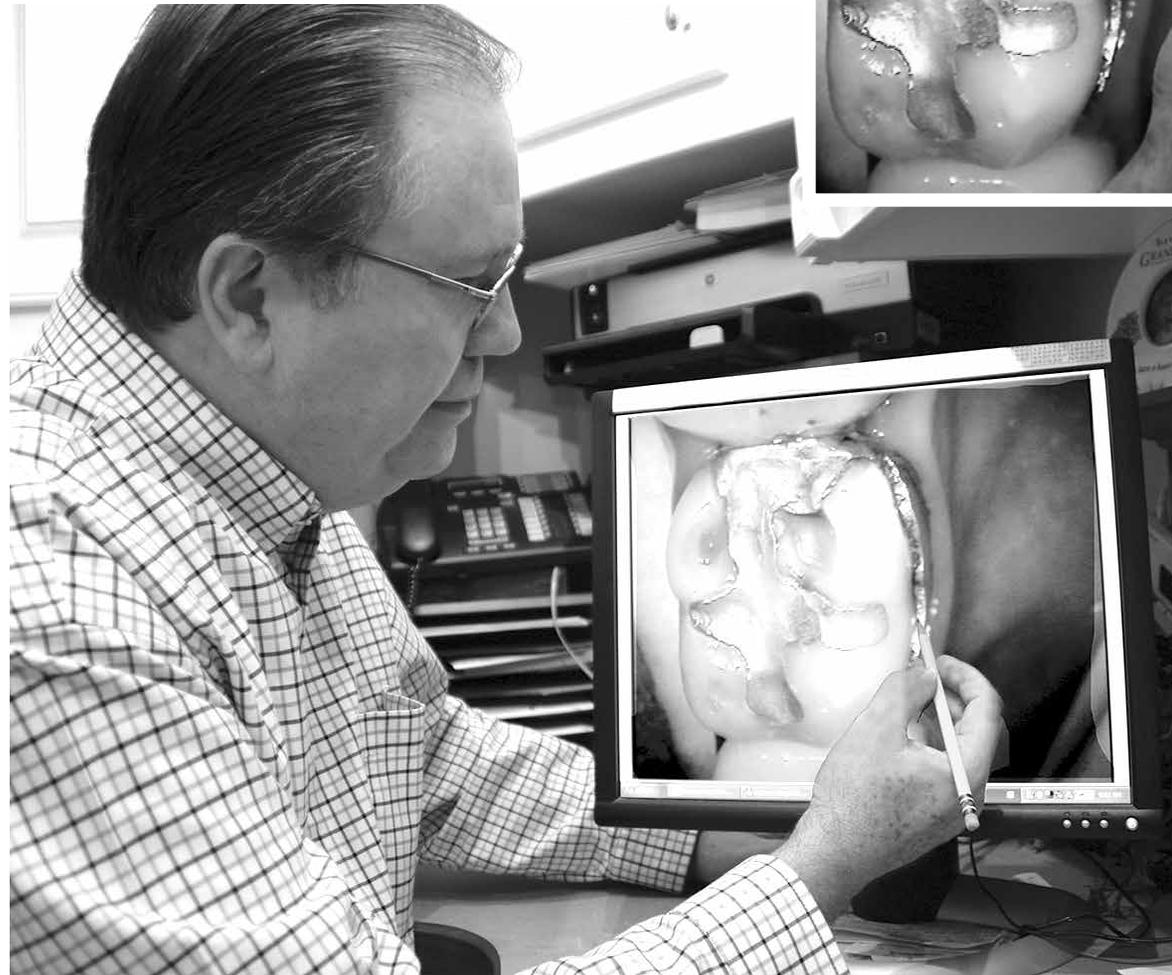
“I’ve seen patients who, when they have diseased teeth removed, immediately have a turnaround in their health,” he says. “One recent example was a patient in his early 40s, who had several really diseased teeth—decayed at the gum line—that he just hadn’t taken care of for one reason or another. He told me that the teeth came out last week, and as soon as the surgeon removed them, his sinuses cleared up. He hadn’t been able to breathe like this in years. It appears that there were enough toxins at the tips of those root-canal-treated teeth to cause chronic sinus problems. Although his physicians had been treating him with a variety of antibiotics, none had worked. What did work was getting rid of the cause; he’s got more energy now and he can breathe.”

ROOT CANAL RISKS

While root-canal-treated teeth do not pose a high risk, Dr. Willock notes, sometimes they may be the source of significant problems. “I would estimate that 90 percent of root canal procedures are successful and create no lasting problems,” he says. “But, for some people, the procedure fails to eliminate all the bacteria in the root canal, and the toxins they produce seep into your bloodstream. This is more likely if there’s massive decay involved.

“When there are problems,” he says, “I don’t think it has anything to do with the quality care by the people who did the root canal; it’s really about the challenge of eliminating all the toxins. However, because we understand the critical connection between oral health problems and systemic

Oral Health: *Affecting the Body’s Balancing Act*



Dental amalgam—principally made up of mercury and silver—gets brittle over time. And, from the day it is placed, it begins to leak because it does not bond to the tooth, but is rather a tight “press fit.”

Dr. Willock examines an amalgam filling, which, over time, has cracked and fractured, due to constant expansion and contraction.

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health issues, we pay special attention when a patient with a history of root canals exhibits symptoms of toxic exposure, and may urge them to get the problem tooth or teeth removed. And,” he notes, “very often, when the tooth is removed, they feel better.”

TOXIC METAL IN THE MOUTH

Notes Dr. Willock: “Another dental issue that can throw the entire body off balance is mercury toxicity. Mercury is one of the most poisonous substances on the planet; more toxic than arsenic; there is no safe level of mercury. Thus, directly or indirectly, mercury can contribute to or make worse every health issue we deal with. Unfortunately, it’s one of the components—along with silver—used in the dental amalgam fillings that have been used to fill cavities for well over a century. And, although new non-toxic filling materials have been developed, amalgam

fillings—including mercury—are still being used in some dental practices.”

Dr. Willock explains that mercury will “off gas” continually as we chew, and this vapor is inhaled and absorbed by the body. It passes into the blood stream and attaches to the hemoglobin molecule that carries oxygen around the body to various bodily tissues and cells. Because it’s transported throughout the body by the blood, it may settle in different organs, causing a variety of diseases.

“Old metal fillings expand and contract as a person eats hot and cold foods,” he explains. “They don’t bond to a tooth, so

they leak—beginning the day they are put in. As the leakage gets greater over time, we find that many people develop systemic problems such as fatigue, brain fog, and tinnitus, or ringing in the ears.

“When we see these signs and symptoms we urge people to consider having their amalgams removed,” he says, but cautions: “Removing amalgam fillings is a significant health event, with the potential of exacerbating the toxicity problem if not done carefully. We do the extraction quickly—the procedure can be done in minutes—and we take all possible precautions to avoid any leakage.”

TREATING THE ROOT CANAL

Worldwide, root canal treatments are over 90 percent successful, Dr. Willock notes. “Sometimes, however—especially if the teeth have been allowed to rot away—bacteria can start growing rapidly and create all kinds of problems.

“Each tooth has its own blood circulatory system: a separate nerve and blood supply. If that nerve, in the center of the tooth, becomes diseased, a hole is drilled in the top of the tooth, a very small file goes in there, and the diseased nerve is pulled out. The inside walls of the dentin are scrubbed clean as much as possible, then some inert material is packed in there to fill the hole.”

This is a careful procedure, notes Dr. Willock, focused on eliminating any sources of infection. “However, sometimes toxins will get into the blood stream and migrate to other parts of the body. No one knows why toxins spread; perhaps there’s a crack in the side of the canal that allowed bacteria to work down and multiply. It’s not the bacteria but the toxins that they give off that create the problem, and once these toxins multiply to a certain level then the balance is upset and the body starts to rebel.”

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A holistic approach to oral health and wellness**