

Ask Dr. Huff....



Kevin D. Huff, D.D.S.

Often at a check-up patients hear the dentist say to their assistant, "Let's put a 'Watch' on that." This term is used for many reasons. Usually it means that there is a filling that is beginning to fail but does not warrant immediate replacement,

or it can mean that there is a small area of decay that is not big enough to do a filling yet. In the past, the dentist would "watch" until the cavity got big enough to replace. Normally, a "Watch" would definitely require a filling in the near future. Today, however, we know that small cavities can actually be **remineralized**, or "healed" with fluoride. In fact, today a "Watch" may never need to be restored.

A "Watch", or **incipient lesion**, is an area of dental decay which has not actually cavitated, or perforated the enamel crown of the tooth. Studies have shown that often early dental decay can be completely arrested. However, once the decay reaches the **dentin**, or live part

of the tooth, the decay must be removed and restored with gold, amalgam, porcelain, or resin.

There are several options available for the non-surgical management of initial dental decay. However, they don't work for all patients. Some of these treatments include mouth rinses, fluoride therapy, sealants, special toothpastes, etc. Sometimes, we may opt not to do any treatment at all for a "Watch".

Lasers can be used to determine "watches" from actual cavities on the chewing surfaces of teeth, which allows dentists to diagnose decay before it is clinically visible directly or on x-rays. Very effective toothpastes are available

that claim to remineralize teeth. Xylitol, a new artificial sweetener with some antibiotic properties, is now legal for use in the United States. There have also been reports that a dental caries vaccine is being studied. The time may come when you will be able to go to the dentist and get a little pinch that will completely prevent cavities!

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