

# Pain is poor predictor of progression

When presented with a diagnosis of tooth fracture, decay, or abnormal wear on teeth, many people postpone treatment “until it hurts.” There is a common misunderstanding that pain is a predictor of the progression of dental disease. However, this is far from the case.

People experience pain at different levels. For some, pain is perceived from minimal stimuli, such as a very small cavity. For others, severe dental abscesses cause minimal to no pain. This is because the signal of pain conduction through the spinal cord and brainstem to the cortex of the brain is mediated by several factors, not the least of which are emotions, nicotine, and stress. Quite often it is a case of mind over matter.

For example, I had a patient recently who had complained of no pain nor symptoms for several years. However, during a routine set of dental x-rays, three significant chronic



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abscesses were discovered. Unfortunately, two teeth could not be saved due to the extent of infection, and one tooth had to have root canal therapy performed. This patient had been reluctant to have dental x-rays taken regularly because from her perspective, she had experienced no discomfort.

Dentists typically recommend that between four and seven “bitewing” x-rays are taken once a year. These films show the bone levels between the teeth and decay that may be developing in between the teeth. In addition, it is typically recommended that a full series of dental radiographs, which show the complete roots of all of the teeth, be taken every three to five years, depending on the amount of fillings,

crowns, etc., that a patient has. Unfortunately, regular radiographs are often not taken unless an obvious problem is found, for various reasons. This is not, however, what is considered to be the standard of care.

Since pain is a poor predictor of the progression of dental disease or injury, it is essential to discuss any concerns that your dentist or dental hygienist may have about your teeth at every recare appointment. Regular careful examinations and radiographic evaluations are necessary for prevention and early discovery of disease.

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*For questions about dental health or to schedule a complementary consultation, call 330-364-2011, visit [www.doctorhuff.net](http://www.doctorhuff.net), or ask your regular dentist.*