



Sydney Holistic Dental Centre

...linking oral health and general health

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Holistic Dentistry

Dr. Ron Ehrlich was interviewed by

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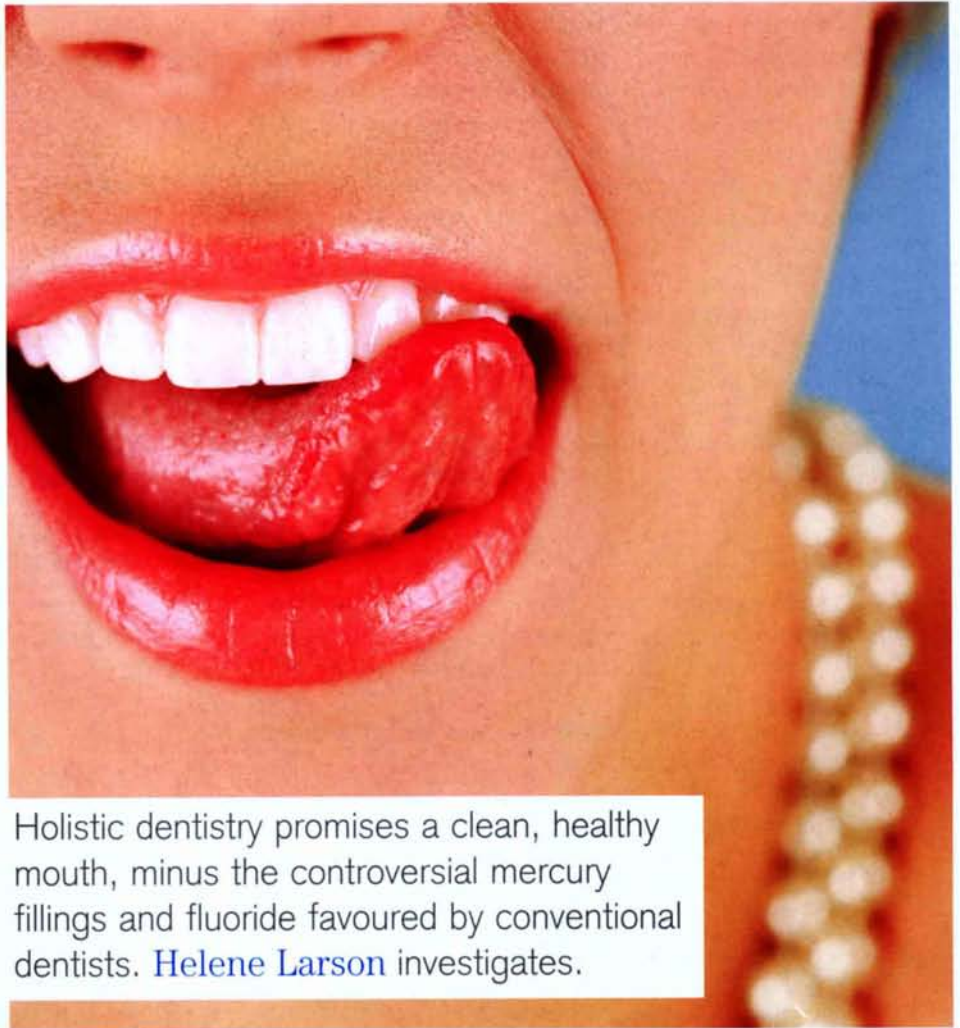
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good health

stay smiling.

Does the thought of a trip to the dentist send you running for cover? If so, you're not alone. Around half of the population suffers from some degree of dental phobia, and usually with good reason – tooth extraction, cavity filling and root canal therapy are just a few of the painful procedures you may have had, unless you've been blessed with exceedingly good teeth. However, such treatments may become a thing of the past with the advent of a new breed of practitioner – the holistic dentist.

Holistic dentistry is concerned with the whole patient, not just their teeth. Numerous studies show that tooth decay and periodontal disease can negatively impact general health, while bacteria travelling from the mouth to the organs has also been shown to cause specific disorders like heart attack, stroke, diabetes, cancer and osteoporosis.¹ Keeping your mouth in tip-top shape will reduce your risk of these diseases. "The starting point in treating patients is that all aspects of the body are connected, so all decisions and advice need to be given with that in mind," says Dr Ron Erlich, founder of the Sydney Holistic Dental Centre. "The emphasis is always on prevention first and minimal intervention, to allow the body to access its own innate healing ability."



Holistic dentistry promises a clean, healthy mouth, minus the controversial mercury fillings and fluoride favoured by conventional dentists. [Helene Larson](#) investigates.

The mouth-body connection

Several recent studies have established links between oral and bodily illness. For example, the American Academy of Periodontology has found that people with periodontal disease are twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease.

Another study concluded that the presence of gum disease, cavities, and missing teeth, were as good at predicting heart disease as cholesterol levels. Why? The theory is that inflammation caused by periodontal disease increases plaque build up, which in turn contributes to swelling of the arteries, ultimately leading to heart disease.

Scientists from the University of Florida are currently undertaking an intensive study into this subject. Researcher Paulo Rodrigues says,

WHAT ABOUT FLOSS?

Some holistic dentists say to watch out for tooth flosses impregnated with unnecessary flavouring, antiseptics, and colourings; some are even coated with petrochemical-derived waxes. Your best bet is to choose a floss without flavour or colour.

"There is increasing evidence that Porphyromonas gingivalis, an important bacterium that causes gum disease, is also linked to cardiovascular disease. We have identified and studied four genes of P. gingivalis that allow it to infect and survive inside artery cells."²

Other studies have noted likely relationships between periodontal disease and stroke, gum disease and respiratory illness, and even between gum disease and prostate cancer.³

When you first visit a holistic dentist, he or she will discuss your at-home oral hygiene routine, your toothpaste, diet, sleep patterns and stress levels with you in detail, so as to get a thorough understanding of your health before you even open your mouth.

A comprehensive oral examination of teeth, gums and jaw will follow, often involving x-rays. The tongue and saliva are also checked. Your tongue accurately reflects the state of your digestive system, and can reveal vitamin and mineral deficiencies, as well as immune system problems. Your saliva is not only a good indicator of your general health: to a holistic dentist, its pH can predict disease, with over-acid saliva making you more prone to arthritis, osteoporosis, cardiovascular and digestive illnesses, as well as type 2

diabetes. Any dental advice is combined with recommendations on nutrition, posture, body chemistry and biomechanics, resulting in a personalised health plan for every patient.

The mercury issue

If you have silver-coloured fillings in your mouth, they are most likely mercury amalgam, made up of about 50 per cent mercury, plus silver, tin, copper, and occasionally zinc. Mercury is highly toxic and escapes slowly, in vapour form, over the life of a filling, leaching out as a result of the galvanic reaction that occurs when dissimilar metals are placed in a moist environment, such as the mouth. Chronic exposure to mercury vapour can produce neurological effects such as tremors

BEST BUYS

Concerned about fluoride, aluminium, sugar, sodium lauryl sulphate or any other nasties that might be found in conventional toothpaste? Visit your local healthfood store or the healthfood section of your supermarket, and choose from a wide variety of fluoride-free toothpastes and gels flavoured with mint, citrus or herbs.

All contain natural ingredients, and many are certified organic. Here are our top picks:

GENESIS ORGANICS CERTIFIED ORGANIC TOOTHGEL

\$6.65 for 80g www.o-n-e.com.au

All-organic ingredients (certified by the Biological Farmers of Australia) including lemon, Celtic sea-salt, grapefruit seed extract, sage and eucalyptus, in a light gel formulation. 100 per cent biodegradable with no artificial preservatives, colours or fragrances. Has an unusual lemony/salty taste that may take a little getting used to!



GRANTS MINERAL-HERBAL TOOTHPASTE

\$3.95 for 110g www.lateralfood.com

Contains natural ingredients like mint and eucalyptus oils, cardamom, celery, aloe vera, rosemary and sage, and is free from fluoride, aluminium, sodium lauryl sulphate, and sugar. Upon brushing, subtle flavours of eucalyptus, cardamom and rosemary emerge. Children liked the mild taste.



THURSDAY PLANTATION TEA TREE TOOTHPASTE

\$4.45 for 110g;

www.thursdayplantation.com

Australian-made and owned, this fluoride-free toothpaste helps to control bacteria which cause plaque through use of tea tree oil, a natural antiseptic, and mint. While quite creamy in texture, after brushing your mouth is left tingly and fresh.



WELEDA RATANHIA TOOTHPASTE

\$7.25 for 75ml www.weleda.co.uk

Works to strengthen the gums through its active ingredient ratanhia, and uses natural chalk as its main cleaning agent. Essential oils of peppermint and spearmint provide a cool minty aftertaste. No synthetic fragrances, colours or preservatives are permitted, and it is fluoride-free. Weleda's range also includes a children's toothgel.



PHYTOSHIELD HERBAL BOTANICAL TOOTHPASTE

\$6.95 for 100 g; www.phytoshield.com

Contains antibacterial and antimicrobial totarol, from the New Zealand Totara tree, to fight tooth decay and bad breath. Fluoride- and SLS-free, it uses a polyglucose derived from coconut oil as an alternative foaming agent. Sweetened with xylitol — which has been proven to help reduce cavities — it has a refreshing herbal flavour, thanks to essential oils of anise, basil, clove, liquorice, thyme, and menthol.

and insomnia, as well as gingivitis and kidney dysfunction.⁴

Many holistic dentists suggest removal of mercury amalgam fillings, provided certain criteria are met. In deciding whether or not to remove one, Ehrlich recommends assessing the join between the filling and the tooth. "The breakdown of the join between filling and tooth and the presence of cracks in the tooth as a result of amalgam expanding is often an undiagnosed problem," he says.

Removal requires specialist expertise, however, due to the danger of mercury vapour being inhaled. The preferred method involves the use of a rubber dam (a thin piece of rubber placed over your teeth to protect your lips, cheeks, tongue and throat during the procedure). An alternate source of oxygen is typically used to prevent mercury inhalation while the filling is removed.

Questioning fluoride

In the 1940s, studies on fluoride concluded it was highly effective in preventing cavities, leading to it being routinely added to our toothpaste and water. However, more recent studies have not only shown fluoride to be unsuccessful in preventing tooth decay, but demonstrate that the ingestion of too much may actually be harmful.⁵

One of the concerns holistic dentists have about using fluoride toothpaste – particularly when our water supply is already fluoridated – is that too much fluoride in the body can cause dental fluorosis. This is the failure of tooth enamel to crystallise properly in permanent teeth, causing chalky, opaque blotching on the teeth and, in more severe cases, deep, rust-coloured stains and tooth brittleness.⁶ Dental fluorosis is already prevalent in children, who tend to swallow a lot of toothpaste when brushing their teeth. Holistic dentists favour natural, unfluoridated toothpastes, which are gentler on teeth and carry no associated health risks.

Feed your teeth

Good nutrition is vital for strong, healthy teeth. The antioxidant vitamins, folic acid, flavonoids and zinc are all important for oral health. Together, they

Fluoride can upset thyroid function, and disturbing new research from China indicates a link with brittle bones – and even bone cancer.

boost your immune system, fight gum infection, reduce inflammation, and maintain healthy collagen needed for strong gum tissue. It's also about what you don't eat: "Avoid carbonated drinks, sports drinks and juices," advises Erlich. "They predispose you to acidity, which has a direct impact on tooth decay and gum disease."

Regular brushing – at least twice a day, regular flossing, and getting your teeth checked and professionally

cleaned every six months is also critical. And don't fall for the array of superlative claims made by toothpaste manufacturers. "Ultimately, the thoroughness of your use of toothbrush and floss – together with diet – is more important," says Erlich.

Interested in trying a holistic dentist? Visit www.dentalsearchengine.net.au or www.shdc.com.au to find one near you.



HELENE LARSON has a degree in Economics and Public Health, and has written widely on health and fitness. Contact Helene at Helene-NatureandHealth@hotmail.com.

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Since 1983

Holistic Dentistry relates your oral health to your general health

- Care in the selection of filling and crown materials conducive to good health.
- Care in the removal of mercury amalgam filling
- Effective non-drug treatment of tension headaches, neckaches and migraines
- State-of-the-art technology
- ZOOM teeth whitening system
- Revolutionary OZONE treatment of decay preserving natural tooth structure

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.shdc.com.au

or contact our surgery on 9221 5800

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