




Ask the Dentist

Got a question for a dentist?

If you have a question you would like answered by a Ministry of Health-approved dentist, send it to us at enquiries.anjar@gmail.com. This issue, your questions are answered by **Dato' Dr. How Kim Chuan** and **Dr. David Tan** of Imperial Dental Specialist Centre.

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

My husband was eating his dinner three weeks ago when all of a sudden, a chunk of tooth from his back molar broke off. He's currently left with a huge hole in his mouth, but refuses to visit a dentist because he's not experiencing any pain. Why is it that my husband has experienced no pain? How long will it take for that tooth to become decayed or infected? If he does undergo dental treatment, what would it entail?

Laura, Petaling Jaya

There could be a few possibilities why your husband didn't feel any pain. Perhaps the cavity is still far away from the pulp (the centre of the tooth where the nerves are located), or the tooth was root canal treated before, or it may be that the tooth is non-vital (dead).

If the huge cavity is left alone, I worry that food will get trapped there easily, as it is challenging to clean that area. If the food (plaque) is left there for a day, it will begin to demineralize that tooth's surface and will progress to tooth decay.

As for treatment, we first will need to check for the extension of the cavity, location of the cavity, vitality of the tooth and his occlusion (bite). Combining this information with an x-ray, we will then be able to give a diagnosis and proper treatment plan. If it's a vital tooth with a relatively small cavity and not subjected to strong bite forces, filling will do. However, if the segment is subjected to heavy forces, it is recommended for a protective coverage such as crown or onlay.

Given that your husband refuses to visit a dentist, I assume he's not had his teeth checked for a long time. This may lead to possibilities of big composite fractures or even tooth exfoliation due to severe periodontal problems. In my professional opinion, it's best that your husband seeks immediate dental intervention



THE DENTIST DILEMMA

My son is nine-years old and deathly afraid of dentists. His first experience scared him, as he hated the dental drills. He kicked and screamed so hard that we had to leave the clinic and reschedule the procedure. My son now refuses to undergo treatment and I'm afraid his cavities will get worse. What can I do? Any help is appreciated!

Shereen, Taman Seputeh

Normally we will try behavior management first, where we dentists introduce ourselves, the chair and the dental instruments in order to allow the child to slowly get used to the dental environment.

This may require many frequent visits until the child is comfortable to start with dental treatment. During those visits, we will keep reinforcing his oral hygiene, teaching the proper way of brushing, doing a simple diet analysis, apply fluoride varnish and recommending special toothpastes to strengthen his teeth, reducing the risk or progression of dental caries. Some dental clinics use laser to remove the caries instead of using dental drills. Laser would be a better option when he is comfortable with the dentist and ready to start dental treatment.

However, let's say if your son is really in need of immediate treatment, sedation may help. Some clinics do offer nitrous oxide (laughing gas) to calm the patient down while still in a conscious manner, and will allow the dentist to begin treatment.

If nothing works, the last resort would be dental treatment under general anesthesia in a hospital where the child will be unconscious during the treatment.

Patience is very essential. You may need to keep bringing him to visit the dentist until he is comfortable with the dentist and the dental chair. Meanwhile, ensure that your son is maintaining good oral hygiene. Please reduce the frequency of snacking and always brush teeth before he sleeps.

