

“The Best Decision I Ever Made...The Journey Begins”

By: Dr. Dimitri Perdikis

In my last article, I shared my frustrations regarding my previous dentist and his practice. Hearing my woes, my friend recommended I see Dr. Perdikis, a Prosthodontist in West Hartford.

Just what is a Prosthodontist? I called Dr. Perdikis' office and learned that a Prosthodontist's areas of expertise include TMD (jaw joint problems), snoring, sleep disorders, oral cancer reconstruction and care, aesthetic/cosmetic work, crowns, bridges, veneers, inlays, complete removable partial dentures, dental implants, fixing traumatic injuries to the mouth and congenital or birth anomalies to teeth.

Today I returned for my comprehensive exam. Amanda Dr. Perdikis' hygienist, has been a registered hygienist for more than seventeen years, eight of which were in a practice specializing in gum disease. She's worked in this office since 2001. She spent a good deal of time with me. Kind and respectful, she listened and treated me as an individual, not a generic patient. In the course of conversation, I told her about my twins and asked if a Prosthodontist treats children. Yes, Dr. Perdikis loves treating children and because of his gentle nature, children love him. He can correct problems with a child's bite with a simple appliance. Sometimes this is required for only a few weeks, and it can eliminate full braces later on. Wow! That's a huge savings in money, time, and inconvenience!

Back to my exam. We started by reviewing my health history to uncover allergies or medical conditions that could possibly affect my treatment. It also reveals

if I am at risk for oral cancer. Next, she took my blood pressure, which was high. Since being nervous can influence this (though I promised her I wasn't), we took it again at the end of the appointment. Still high, Dr. Perdikis recommended I see my medical doctor as soon as possible because of this, as well as some symptoms I checked off on my health history. (Little did I know I'd been putting off a visit to my primary physician due to my weight gain).

Our next step: a full series of x-rays. Amanda explained that visual exams wouldn't reveal small areas of decay between the teeth or below existing fillings, which x-rays will. Films also show infections in the bone, gum disease, abscesses or cysts, developmental abnormalities, and some types of tumors. Treating these conditions early is crucial, not only for reducing costs and discomfort, but more importantly, it can sometimes stave off serious complications.

The radiation scared me. Amanda explained that we're exposed to radiation every day (even from appliances like smoke detectors and TV screens, in our homes!) and assured me that the amount I would be exposed to was miniscule compared to what I receive in my day to day life.

Next came my oral cancer exam. Did you know that oral cancer kills more Americans every year than skin or cervical cancer? Neither did I. Even more frightening, the five year survival rate is only around 50 percent. Is this because not enough people get checked for oral cancer, when it is detected, it's already in the advanced stages? Amanda said studies show an increased survival rate with early diagnosis. To lower my risk, I was urged to stop smoking and reduce alcohol consumption. No surprise. What did surprise me, the suggestions to use lip balm

with sunscreen and to eat more fruits and vegetables (which would help with my weight gain too).

The exam continued documenting the status of my entire mouth, including the condition of my teeth, locations of missing teeth, quality of how well my teeth fit together, and health of my jaw joints. Dr. Perdikis uses all this information to formulate his treatment plan, and then we'll sit down together and decide which approach is best for me.

The last part of the exam was the periodontal probing, a simple and painless procedure. Amanda explained there are small spaces between our gums and teeth, like a moat around a castle. She gently probed the depth of these pockets to gauge the health of the tissue. Healthy gums have no bleeding or pus and have shallow pockets.

I was upset to learn my "moats" are deep. From this and by evaluating the x-rays, Dr. Perdikis told me I have periodontal disease. I was shocked. Everything felt fine. How could I?

Dr. Perdikis explained it's critical to get my gums healthy, since they are the "foundation" for my teeth. If I don't address the periodontal disease, it will progress, possibly to the point that I could lose my teeth. He also told me I will always have periodontal disease - but it's up to me whether it worsens and puts my teeth at risk, or if I manage it through lifestyle, dental hygiene, and dental supervision.

This appointment with Dr. Perdikis impacted my entire life. I have to take care of myself - now. No more excuses. I need to quit smoking, not only for the health of my heart and lungs, but also of my teeth, gums, and entire mouth.

Read my next article in the Hartford Women's Journal, and I'll explain the treatment for my periodontal disease.