

At the dentist, you're home, sweet home

Charles Poland III, DDS, Castleton Pediatric Dentistry, Indianapolis;

Harold A. Smith, DDS, Smith-Brauer Dentistry, Indianapolis

Dental Home. The ongoing relationship between the dentist who is the Primary Dental Care Provider and the patient, which includes comprehensive oral health care, beginning no later than age one, pursuant to ADA policy.

—American Dental Association, Oct. 2005

Chances are, when you visit your family doctor for a check-up, he or she will ask you a series of questions about your overall health: Do you use tobacco products? Have you abused drugs or alcohol? How often do you visit your dentist? Your general practitioner, as a stakeholder in your overall health, considers these behaviors to be important for determining your risk factors for illness.



Charles Poland III



Harold A. Smith

Your dentist: your partner for overall health

clinical X-rays may indicate osteoporosis. Dentists are often the first to spot the telltale signs of teenage eating disorders or to recommend children for speech therapy. When your dentist has a trusting, long-term professional relationship with you and your family, it makes spotting these health problems in time for corrective action much more likely.

But did you know that from about age 2 on, you're more likely to visit your dentist for regular check-ups than you are your family doctor? That makes your dentist—and your dental home—the primary stakeholder and first line of defense for your overall health, not just a place to get your teeth cleaned.

Like general practitioners, dentists strive to provide you and your family with a lifelong venue for comprehensive prevention and treatment of disease: the **dental home**. Staffed by properly trained providers and assistants, the ideal dental home is accessible, affordable, family-centered, continuous, comprehensive, compassionate and culturally sensitive. The dental home is a place where you and your dentist can establish mutual understanding and trust that will enrich your professional relationship and provide you with better care.

Knowing your background and medical history over the long haul makes it more likely that your dentist will be able to identify any behaviors or conditions that place you at risk for dental disease or other illness. It also gives dentists the information they need to personalize your care.

Your dentist may be the first to notice a suspicious mole or pre-cancerous or cancerous lesion in your mouth. Gum disease, loose or ill-fitting dentures and bone loss in the jaw detected through

The dental home for a child starts at age 1 and provides:

- An accurate risk assessment for tooth decay and individualized preventive dental program
 - A behavioral guidance program to establish a positive attitude about dental care that transcends common fears or phobias: **children should not fear coming to the dentist**
 - Guidance on growth and development issues, such as thumb and pacifier habits
 - Information about proper nutrition and the dangers of sippy cups with juice
 - Referrals to other dental or medical specialists when necessary
 - A plan for emergency dental trauma
 - Restorative and surgical care that meets the parent's and child's psychological needs
 - Comprehensive care in accordance with accepted standards, guidelines and periodic schedules for pediatric dental health
- As the child transcends through the teen years to adulthood, the adult dental home becomes a center not just for oral health but also for general wellness.

The adult dental home provides:

- An accurate risk assessment for cavities and periodontal disease and screening for oral cancer and other systemic diseases that may manifest on the oral region
- The promise of a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums
- Periodic encouragement to do the daily homecare recommended by your dental team
- A lifelong relationship with a dentist who truly cares about your oral health and general health
- A welcoming place to visit and bring your family
- A place filled with caring professionals and friends who care
- A comforting voice and willingness to help when unforeseen emergencies arise
- The experience and skill to help solve dental problems as the years bring their challenges
- Being a part of a dental family and being treated like a valued family member
- Sharing important family and personal milestones with friends who are truly interested
- Sharing life's sadness and challenges with friends who care and want to be supportive

So you can see, the dental home is important not only in establishing a comfortable environment for providing comprehensive oral health care, it can be a vital link to overall good health. Think about your dental home and ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I honest with my dentist about my health history and behaviors?
- Do I faithfully adhere to recommended prevention and treatment regimens?
- Am I modeling good oral health habits, including regular dental visits, for my children?
- Have I invited other family members to join my dental home?
- What questions can I ask my dentist to maximize the benefits of my dental home?

Remember, when it comes to your dental health, there's no place like home.