

Oral Health Initiative at NBHC Meridian Dental mounts major offensive against tooth decay

“You have cavities.”

These are dreaded words heard by some people during their annual dental exam. But, it doesn't have to be that way!

In the past 20 years, much scientific research has been focused on identifying those who are at greatest risk for developing tooth decay, and treatment protocols to reduce that risk.

People with the highest risk of developing tooth decay generally have higher concentrations of specific decay-causing bacteria living in their oral environments (mouths). Those bacteria, in combination with a diet high in carbohydrates (sugars), can cause significant problems for many people.

During a dental examination at a military healthcare facility, a member's risk for developing dental disease is determined. In Navy facilities, the guideline for determining that risk is set forth in instruction, BUMEDINST 6600.16. At the top of the list for managing that high “caries” risk is training.

At Naval Branch Health Clinic Meridian Dental, we have established a training program for members at high risk for dental caries (tooth decay). Registered Dental Hygienist Betty Whobrey, with help from other staff members including Debbie Wilson, has developed an educational presentation revolving around proper oral hygiene, diet and other measures that are taken to reduce the recurrence of tooth decay for our patients. At the end of the training, the participant is given a fluoride treatment, and more visits are scheduled for fluoride treatments if indicated.

With the help of the NAS Meridian Public Affairs Of-

fice staff much of the training has been filmed and is in video format.

Knowledge is power. That statement applies to so many things in life. It also applies to dental health. Dental health is important for quality of life, and is an essential part of overall military readiness.

NBHC Meridian dental department recommends:

- ✓ If you smoke or use smokeless tobacco, quit!

- ✓ Brush teeth three times a day with toothpaste containing fluoride. Fluoride is one of the most powerful “weapons” in the war against tooth decay. The good news is that all “name-brand” toothpastes contain fluoride as their active ingredient.

- ✓ If you have had one or more cavities in the last two years, it is a good idea to use a fluoride rinse (available over the counter) before going to bed at night.

- ✓ Floss teeth once a day. Proper flossing involves a gentle up-and-down scrubbing motion on the side of each tooth, in between teeth.

Reduce the number of times per day that you eat refined carbohydrates (sugars).

- ✓ Chew sugarless gum. Chewing sugarless gum stimulates salivary flow, which helps to neutralize and clear bacterial acids. Some artificial sweeteners (notably xylitol) retard the growth of bacterial plaque, and help to diminish the advance of tooth decay.

Cmdr. Bruce Green is currently the dental department head at Naval Branch Health Clinic Meridian. He received his D.D.S. from Louisiana State University Dental School, and his M.S. in Health Sciences from the George Washington University. He holds a Certificate in Comprehensive Dentistry from Naval Postgraduate Dental School, and is a diplomate of the American Board of General Dentistry