

DENTISTS LIMIT USE OF X-RAYS

Dear Dr. Meinig: My wife paid you a visit some months ago, complaining of an ache in her upper jaw. You immediately deduced that her "bite" needed correction, and by filling several teeth in her lower jaw, the problem was resolved. And it has not returned.

What impressed me is that you did not take x-rays. Most dentists I have known in the past would have insisted on x-rays.

Is it your opinion that this practise is presently being abused? And is it not true that much damage can result from the excessive use of x-rays? C.L.

Dear C.L.: From my experience and reports in the dental literature, dentists generally have not ^{EXCESSIVELY} prescribed ~~excessive~~ use of X-ray pictures. There have been a few isolated incidents, but nothing like what is portrayed in the public press. I can assure you that local Ojai Valley dentists do not over use their X-ray machines.

The problem of excess radiation has not arisen because of dental usage, as the amount of exposure to our patients is very small. The great increase in recent years has occurred in general medical practice. So many new diagnostic uses have been found, that total radiation exposure has often increased alarmingly.

For this reason dentists have reduced the number of pictures they recommend, in order to cut the total amount that people receive. There is no question that over-exposure to X-rays is dangerous. Dentists and physicians who take X-ray

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pictures are exposed to secondary radiation daily and probably are subjected to more in a year or two than most patients ^{receive} in a life time. If at times we appear calloused about their use it is because, as a group, we don't seem ^{to} experience any bad effects from over exposure. Surely those in the past who were careless about self exposure eventually died of its effects. Most doctors who take X-ray pictures are more concerned than patients, even though it may appear otherwise.

The use of dental X-rays in finding hidden dental decay and oral infections is so beneficial in saving teeth, that serious questions remain as to whether postponement of such findings is not more damaging to patients' health than the effect of the X-ray exposure. Frankly, our profession could be criticized for too little use of the X-ray machine, rather than too much.

How often a dentist recommends X-rays today depends on the mouth conditions, health of the patient, and amount of past radiation ~~exposure~~ of all types. Not all mouth conditions are benefited, or require the taking of these pictures, but any patient has the right to refuse to submit to X-ray or other radiation, if he/she so desires. Your dentist should be told of your past radiation exposure and your opinion. He or she will be understanding, whether they agree or disagree with your feelings.

The great strides made in our ability to save teeth for a lifetime demand early disclosure of mouth disease. Individuals who have saved their teeth seem, for the most part, to live longer, healthier lives. This is the ideal most dentist work hard to accomplish.

Everyone has a question about nutrition, Send yours to Dr. George
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