



quality to their work, perhaps evoking their bloody profession from days of yore. The first true dental college, Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, opened in 1840, and then Philadelphia Dental College, in 1863. Since then, dentists receive the finest educations that money can buy. Today, our modern dentists specialize in all sorts of concerns of the mouth, teeth, and gums, and more—all with kindness, integrity, and most importantly, without pain.

I occasionally shop around for discount health and dental care, and a couple of years ago I found myself visiting a dental college, upon the advice from a friend, to have a tooth pulled by a dental student. “Why pay a real dentist \$200 to pull your tooth when you can get it pulled at the dental school for less than \$75?” she said. “It’s just a tooth. It takes, like, five minutes, and you’re out of there.” Sure, I thought, that makes sense. After all, barbers used to pull teeth; it can’t be that difficult.

I arrived at the school’s dental office early one morning—apparently they don’t make appointments and only take only a certain amount of patients each day. I was one of the first patients in the door that morning; as I sat down in the chair, very loud, heavy metal music was pounding through the walls, while students, who looked like mere children, buzzed about in white lab coats, singing and high-fiving each other. Suddenly, I didn’t want to be there, especially after hearing laughter and chatter about some wild party the students had attended the night before. A female student took my blood pressure and seemed alarmed by the results. A male student grabbed my shoulder and looked deep into my eyes. “You’re not going to stroke out on us, are you, ma’am? Okay, let’s get this show on the road!” he hollers, as someone sticks a needle in my gum while another wields a set of pliers and pulls my tooth out in one swift jerk. Someone else shoves some cotton in my mouth and I soon find myself outside on the sidewalk, waiting for my ride home, dizzy with disbelief.

Okay, it really wasn’t that bad. I mean, I got my tooth pulled quickly at a good price, it didn’t hurt, and I like to think I helped some dental students get more experience in their field—although I would recommend that they work on their bedside manner. But after that incident, I made a point to find a professional female dentist, nearby my home, who offers me expert and pain-free dental work. I still brush and floss several times a day, but now and then I end up with a small cavity. My dentist doesn’t express disapproval. Rather she says, “Would you like Novocain for this?” and I say, “Yes, please. Lots and lots of Novocain.” *

Sporting CHANCE

STUDIES EXAMINE HOW EXERCISE AFFECTS TOOTH HEALTH

BY JESSICA PETTENGILL

EXERCISE IS THE GREATEST FAVOR you can do for all parts of your body—except, sometimes, your teeth. While the most traumatic potential injuries to athletes—you know, concussions, torn ligaments and broken bones—are well-documented, the effects of exercise on teeth are just starting to be examined. A study by Dr. Maeda Kumamoto conducted in 2005 showed that up to 39 percent of all dental injuries occur due to sports and exercise.

An injury common in many kinds of sports is tooth avulsion, or the loss of one or more teeth due to blunt force trauma. Nearly three million teeth were avulsed during U.S. youth sporting events in 2011, according to the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation.

Dr. Scott Wagner of Eccella Smiles, whose practice specializes in sports dentistry, advises athletes to invest in professionally fitted mouth guards in order to prevent tooth injuries while playing contact sports. Even though it can be more expensive, proper prevention is crucial to avoiding injury.

“Top tier mouth guards can increase performance because they take torque—which athletes can develop due to a bad bite—off of the upper cervical spine,” says Wagner. “A bad bite has can affect nerve conduction, strength and performance.”

Researchers at the University Hospital Heidelberg in Germany also studied the effect of endurance exercise on teeth, expanding on a 2013 study of more than 200 London Olympic athletes’ oral health, which found that, the more hours a person spends exercising, the more likely he or she is to have cavities. The German study discovered this is due to a decrease in the amount of saliva and an increase in the amount of alkaline in the mouth the longer an individual exercises.

“Some of the athletes we’ve worked with are so dedicated to their sports that they don’t dedicate enough time to proper dental maintenance,” says Wagner.

Wagner points to the higher consumption of carbs and sugar in an endurance diet and a greater risk of decay due to dry mouth, regardless of whether or not the individual is an endurance athlete.

Researchers at NYU have discovered that even swimming impacts teeth negatively. Frequent exposure to high amounts of chlorine in pool water can cause teeth to stain a yellow or brown color, especially common among competitive swimmers. The high pH in the water causes deposits on the teeth called “swimmer’s calculus.” Wagner suggests being conscious of how you swim and using special fluoride toothpastes to prevent stains and decay.

That comfy dentist’s chair never sounded so appealing. *

