

Holistic dentistry: Natural approaches to oral health

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Abstract:

Holistic dentistry or biologic dentistry is an age old alternative approach that is based on the assertion that the whole body is one unit and any changes in one part of this unit can have an impact on the whole unit. Traditional dentistry deals with the head and neck region in general and oral cavity unequivocally but holistic dentistry deals with the unrecognised impact of oral health on the overall health of a person. It focuses on the use of non-toxic restorative materials along with incorporation of techniques like acupuncture and neural therapy. Although this concept and practice has brought about a tranquil revolution but some of the complementary methods followed by holistic dentists are under criticism.

Keywords: Biologic dentistry, Alternative dentistry, Oral Health

Introduction

Health sector has undergone tremendous advancement in the recent past and has seen the rise of many new trends. An ever increasing number of people are taking interest in field of alternative and complementary medicine¹. People have realized the potential efficacy of these health care procedures. This type of dentistry combines dental knowledge with procedures from a variety of medical systems that are designed to improve a person's oral health. The approach is not confined to only one area of a person's body, but it takes into consideration patient's overall health. Therefore, instead of focusing solely on a patient's teeth, dentists are concerned about the relationship between a person's mouth and the rest of their body¹. Holistic dentistry promotes a preventive approach to dentistry. Rather than dealing with dental concerns as they pop up, holistic dentists

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use techniques that are designed to avert common dental problems like tooth decay, tooth disease, and tooth loss. By engaging in this practice, holistic dentists are not simply limiting themselves to treating an oral condition but are creating preventive solutions to problems that may affect the patient's jaw, head, neck, and spine.

History:

The origin of holistic dentistry dates back to 1800, when the National Dental Association recognized the harmful effects of amalgam restoration and mandated that the members of the association should not use it on their patients. This was followed by many countries that have banned the use of mercury. Holistic dentistry rose further in between 1870 to 1948 with Weston A Price. He conducted research and came to the conclusion that degenerative diseases like heart problems, kidney and bladder disorders, arthritis, rheumatism, mental illness, lung problems and many other bacterial infections arise from root canal therapy and endodontic treatments¹. His concept was widely known as "focal infection theory". Support of Price's theories continued further from a dentist named Melvin Page. He coined the phrase "balancing body chemistry" and considered tooth decay an "outstanding example of systemic chemical imbalances." He marketed a mineral supplement with claims that widespread mineral deficiencies were an underlying cause of several health conditions, including goitre, heart diseases, tuberculosis, and diabetes¹. Last few decades have seen an increase in the number of people following holistic dentistry. Holistic dentistry is now arising as a new field of probiotic medicine.

Procedure:

A holistic dentist uses physiologic and electronic methods to locate areas of chronic disease that are difficult to locate by current standard methods. While the method of biological dentistry varies for each holistic dentist, the keys to preparing their patients

remain education and communication. Treatment is individualized.

An initial visit consists of an interview process, examination and x rays. Radiographs of the patient's mouth are often collected with the latest equipment that uses film providing 50% less radiation than standard systems. The second meeting is typically called a "Review of Findings" appointment that educates the patient about the mouth and proactive treatment choices. The benefits of holistic dentistry are said to be the result of its incorporation of hypnosis, homeopathy, aromatherapy, nutrition, and herbology. Holistic dentists may incorporate acupuncture and physical therapy into their use of clinical dentistry. The more modern sciences of neural therapy, hematology, immunology, and electroacupuncture may also be incorporated into a holistic dental practice.

Ayurveda in holistic dentistry:

Ayurveda is one of the oldest systems of medicine from India .It is nearly 5000 years old. Ayurvedic herbs have nature's own power of remedies. The right herb in the right combination keeps the body system in harmony. Formulated herbal tooth powder and paste are available that are effective and safe for number of diseases .These ingredients are combined in such a way that helps in cleaning of teeth, prevention from various dental problems such as dental pain, bleeding gums, mouth fibrosis due to poor eating habits or betel nut chewing habits, poor dental root, sensitive tooth, tobacco chewing habits, dental numbness, formation of tartar, poor dental strength.

Many Ayurvedic formulations are prepared using Neem as a dominant ingredient². It could be in the form of herbal toothpaste or herbal tooth powder making it a unique and powerful oral care formula containing active botanicals such as supercritical extracts of Neem Bark and Leaf, Grape seed, Clove, Fennel and other plants for maximum support of healthy gums and teeth. The herbal neem toothpastes that avoid the use of common "unnatural" ingredients like lauryl sulfate, saccharin,

parabens, artificial colours, artificial flavours or fluoride serve the purpose better. Propolis which is a natural substance based on resins of pine and collected by bees has been reported to cure oral ulcerations³. The sedative properties of chamomile, limeflower, vervain, rosemary, and valerian are relied upon in the practice of holistic dentistry.

Nutrition in holistic dentistry:

Holistic dentists take off from normal premise to consider the impact of dental health in greater depth. They discuss nutrition as it affects dental health. Holistic dentists believe that stress and tension are often linked to diet. Dietary excesses or deficiencies increase the body's needs for essential vitamins and minerals, and the stress and tension accelerate any fears or phobias of the patient.

Aromatherapy in holistic dentistry:

Aromatherapy makes use of pure oil essences from plants and flowers that act as hormone-like stimulants to improve a patient's health balance. They are natural and gentle, oils like lavender, bergamot, sandalwood, and basil are beneficial in their power to soothe, relax, and calm.^{4,5}

Homeopathy in holistic dentistry:

Homeopathy is used by holistic dentists as a natural approach to their practice. The therapy is a safe and natural alternative that is non-addictive and effective with both adults and children. Homeopathic remedies are used to improve the psychological or emotional condition of patients without the drugging effects of conventional tranquilizers. The three main remedies considered by holistic dentists include: aconite (foxglove); gelsemium (yellow jasmine); and argentum nitricum (silver nitrate). Clinical experience has also demonstrated that many homeopathic remedies have been found to be effective for conditions especially dental caries, dental abscess, oral lesions, post-extraction bleeding and even medications to treat the anxious and nervous child⁶.

Hypnosis in holistic dentistry:

When hypnosis is used, patients are able to relax their bodies and minds by concentrating on suggestions of relaxation. The patient is fully aware of what is happening during their treatment and no drugs are used. Its use is mainly suggested for apprehensive patients. It may banish fear and make other anaesthesia unnecessary. The patient surrenders critical faculties rather than will power. Patients have terminated trances when the suggested situations become uncomfortable or threatening⁷. Many holistic dentists employ specialist hypnotherapists to provide treatment that is highly effective and cannot cause any harm or produce any side effects.

Benefits of holistic dentistry:

It is aesthetic, relatively non-toxic, biocompatible approach of treatment. It incorporates alternative medicines like homeopathy, aromatherapy and hypnosis. The proponents of holistic dentistry believe in treating the root cause of the problem rather than just treating the symptom. For example a decayed tooth will just be restored by a conventional dentist but a holistic dentist will discuss the nutrition and eating habits along with restoration of decayed tooth by biocompatible restorative material. A cross sectional study done among the Turkish and Finnish preadolescent population for determining the effect of Life course approach has concluded that cooperation of dentists is vital in assessment of general and dental health in a holistic context throughout the life-course, to enhance the well-being of pre-adolescents⁸. The holistic dentist believes that what affects the oral cavity can affect the whole body and vice versa.

Approach of holistic dentistry:

The approach of Holistic dentistry is open-minded to changes that amalgamation of allopathic stream of treatment and alternative health care might bring working together for the overall benefit of the patients. It adopts modality of understanding body constitution as a whole rather than just a set of teeth and jaws. It puts

equal emphasis on nutrition as may be essential. It also recognizes the fact that the mouth impacts the overall health of a person. It uses biocompatible root fillings than adopting root therapy as traditionally done under the present system. According to supporters of holistic dentistry, the metal ions separate from their original structures to diffuse, migrate to, and become absorbed in the tissues of the body, affecting the overall integrity of the immune system². An additional biological concern is "oral galvanism," or the direct electrical currents generated by separated metals throughout fluids and tissues in the body. Hidden or residual infection, or the abnormal changes in the soft connective tissue containing dental material that cannot be processed, is believed to cause local and general defences that put the body in a continuous state of active conflict, often leading to chronic disease. The understanding in holistic dentistry is to avoid the use of mercury amalgam fillings. The biocompatibilities of the different tooth filling composite resins of non-toxin category are used. Proper nutrition and healthy eating habits are common in all health care systems. But Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, and others instruct the total avoidance of certain foods in a particular condition. But other time same foods may be allowed in day time but not at night, or vice versa, as essential to oral health in particular and overall health in general.

Side-effects:

Certain side effects have been reported as a result of treatments used by holistic dentists. Patients, who were treated with acupuncture of the ear, have experienced complications from unsterile needles¹.

When correcting a "bad bite," holistic dentists often place a plastic appliance called a mandibular orthopedic repositioning appliance between the teeth. The long-term use of this device has been reported to cause the patient's teeth to move out of proper alignment, leading

With amalgam fillings being one of the main concerns of holistic dentists, many have turned to using non-toxic composite materials, but these too have come under scrutiny. The plastics used in the composites have been linked to leaching compounds that may be dangerous to health.

Conclusion:

Holistic dentistry is an emerging field of probiotic dental medicine that supports the life process. It is an aesthetic, relatively nontoxic, and biocompatible treatment modality, or life supporting treatment modality. The knowledge and understanding of Holistic approach of treatments is still an ongoing process and further research should be carried out in this regard.

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