

I'M TOO OLD

Hopefully someone out there said "that's ridiculous," or at least genuinely disagrees. I do have a birthday coming up, so I need some support. I never think like that (yet), but I hear it a lot.

And a patient today reminded me how harmful that attitude can be when considering dental work (she is now one of my favorite patients because she says she reads my column). She only briefly mentioned the fact that she was 80 in our discussion of what dental treatment she needed, but frequently patients tell me "Oh, I only need my teeth for a few more years, so I don't want to waste a lot of money on them." That's a little disheartening. Worse when their children come in with them and tell me the same thing. Maybe if morticians prepared people with a great big grin, good teeth would be more valued?

I always tell these patients the lesson I learned in dental school. My last year I spent one day a week volunteering at a nursing home on the north side of Chicago. Almost every day someone would tell me they wished they had taken better care of their teeth. As one patient put it, "the only thing I really have to look forward to now is my meals, and I can't even enjoy eating any more."

Being able to chew and enjoy your food is the beginning of good nutrition. It is one of the most important but neglected aspects of your health. It may even come in below feet for some people. Never give up. Never tell yourself there will be a point that you won't need your teeth or that a denture would be just fine. And maybe one day the final image of everyone will be "great teeth." It's just a dream.