

## I THINK I HAVE A CAVITY!

This is one of the most common problems that bring patients to the dentist—other than “I couldn’t sleep the last three nights—just make sure this doesn’t hurt.” Usually it is a tiny black spot that someone just noticed on a tooth, and usually it is just a stained area.

Recently, a 42-year old woman came to the practice from downtown Chicago. She called because her children’s dentist had just put a caries(i.e. decay) detection machine on one of her molars and found a “99”! Wow—who wouldn’t be panicked?

We talked for a while, and I explained that the machine really only measures the possible extent of a pit in her tooth (if done correctly), and not *actual* decay. My problem with the machine is that it has always been marketed as a great ROI (return on investment) by the manufacturer. She decided to come in and have me look at the tooth.

Her story was obviously very complicated, but she was very concerned about a possible cavity—she was told that a “99” was the highest possible and it must be a very deep cavity. But when I examined her teeth, the obvious problem was that she had never had a cavity before in her life. I could see no real clinical sign of decay on the tooth, and she had never had any problems.

In the end, she decided to do nothing and just watch to see if it became a more obvious problem, which is what I would have done myself. A popular “dental guru” promotes the device himself, and I have emailed him several times to determine if the machine is really accurate in determining active decay. He has conceded that it is not.

What do you do? Unless you have a working crystal ball-- have regular check-ups, pay attention, use common sense.

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