

## PROBING QUESTIONS

I am often surprised that new patients have no idea what a periodontal probe is, or why dentists use one. Some patients claim they have never even seen one. A periodontal probe is one of the most important tools dentists use to evaluate your oral health.

Basically, it is a very thin wire on a handle with millimeter markings of various types. These markings are used to measure the depth of the sulcus between your gums and teeth. A 1-3 mm depth with no bleeding or pain (no inflammation of the gums) is usually considered normal/healthy. These measurements are made at 6 different locations on each tooth. If your gums are healthy, your dentist might have done periodontal probing and you didn't realize it.

Periodontal probings are important diagnostic information. Having a full history of probing depths for each tooth can be helpful if any tooth or gum problems arise. An increase in probing depth can clue a problem such as non-vital nerve, fracture, acute or chronic trauma, bite problems, etc. If your goal is to make sure you do not end up with any urgent problems, recorded probing depths are an important part of prevention..

Another use of probing depths is monitoring of brushing and flossing effectiveness. If probing depths or bleeding sites change from one visit to the next, it usually means you have not been as thorough removing the plaque in those areas, and we can show you exactly where you need to focus. In fact, we will sometimes give our patients a printout of the probing depths and bleeding sites so they can follow their progress between visits. Increase in bleeding sites can even be a clue to other medical problems.

So, if you have not been getting this information at your check-ups, your next probing question should be: "why not?"