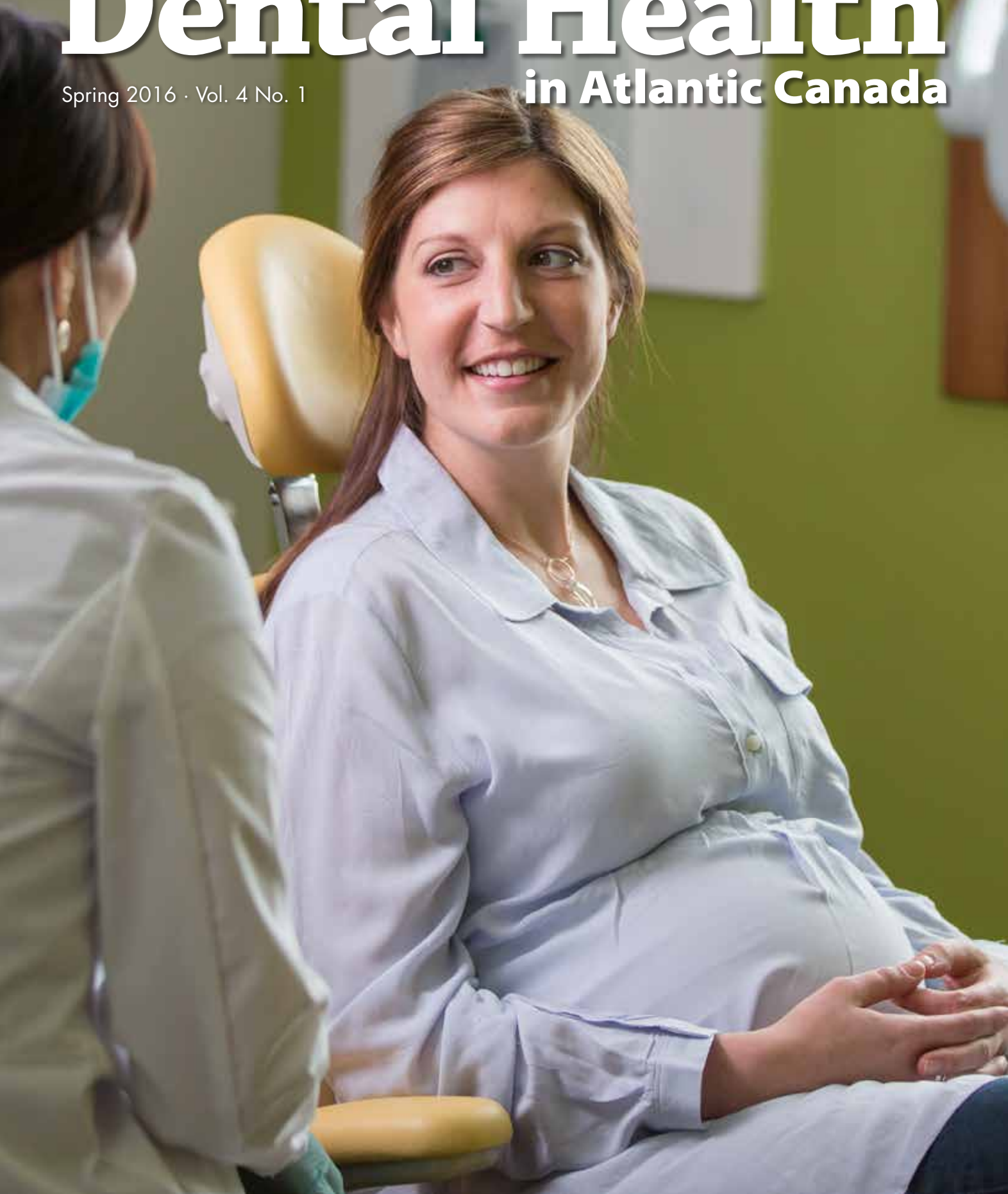


A good beginning | Little teeth, big importance | No more "grin and bear it"

# Your Dental Health

## in Atlantic Canada

Spring 2016 · Vol. 4 No. 1





# FIRST VISIT, FIRST TOOTH

We see infants by age 1  
*or*  
within 6 months of eruption  
of the first tooth.



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Dental Society  
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Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association

# A good beginning

Good oral health is important for mothers-to-be and their babies

by Donalee Moulton

**For women** with a little one on the way, there's a lot to think about: getting the nursery ready, deciding on a name, and preparing for the birth. Topping the list, of course, is ensuring mom and baby are both healthy. That includes having optimum oral health.

"Good oral health makes your whole body healthier," says Dr. Dana Coles, a dentist in Cornwall, PEI.

Three significant problems can occur during pregnancy that mothers-to-be should be aware of and discuss with their dentist. The first is gum disease caused by hormonal changes in a women's body. Pregnancy gingivitis, as the condition is called, makes gums more sensitive because estrogen and progesterone hormones have increased. The gums will often look red, swollen and inflamed, and the condition, which usually appears in the first trimester, can become worse if the bacteria is left along the gum line. Regular brushing and flossing is important.

As well, says Dr. Kelly Manning, a dentist in Saint John, NB, "a professional dental cleaning prior to pregnancy is advised to remove calculus buildup that can increase irritation of the gum tissue."

If possible, she adds, routine dental radiographs, or x-rays should also be taken prior to pregnancy to detect

any cavities. The usual lead-apron protective shield is used to minimize radiation exposure.

Once pregnant, many women suffer from morning sickness, and this can present issues for the mother's oral health. When people vomit, acid from the stomach makes its way to the enamel on their teeth. The tendency



Grace Coles

Dr. Dana Coles, a dentist in Cornwall, PEI.



Martin Flewelling

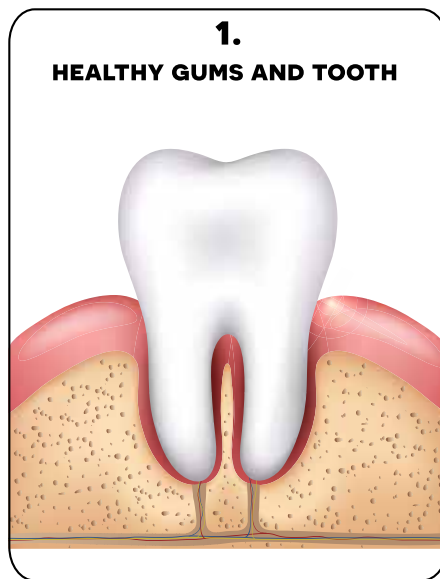
Dr. Kelly Manning, a dentist in Saint John, NB.



Regular brushing and flossing is important for mom and baby.

may be to brush your teeth right away, but avoid this. “Brushing immediately, when the acid is still present, is thought to increase the erosive process, so rinsing with water and then waiting 30 minutes is suggested,” says Dr. Manning. “A two-minute brushing will then help reduce any damage caused by the acid attack.”

The need for emergency care—an aching tooth or a filling that falls out—may also be required during pregnancy. If treatment is necessary, your dentist will take steps to ensure the safest and most comfortable procedure for mother and baby. “We prefer not to take x-rays,



but we can do this with a lead apron if it is an emergency,” says Dr. Coles. “We also reassure patients that the local anesthetic used for fillings and crowns is not harmful to the baby.”

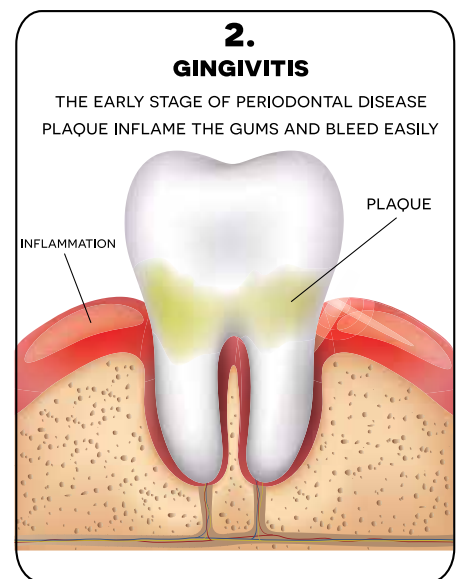
#### Good oral health routines

Ongoing oral health care is important throughout pregnancy for both mother and child. In fact, some recent research has linked a mother’s poor oral health to pre-term and low-weight babies. “When pregnancy occurs, ideally a woman will have good oral health routines that include twice daily brushing with fluoridated toothpaste, flossing once a day and a healthy balanced diet. Also fluoridated drinking water will help maintain a good level of mineral for teeth,” says Dr. Manning.

Regular visits to the dentist are also recommended. Tooth decay, which is caused by plaque, which is a sticky film of bacteria that builds up on teeth, can increase during pregnancy. The bacteria transform sugar and starch in the mouth to an acid that attacks tooth enamel.

Watching what you eat is important. “Mom’s eating more,” says Dr. Coles. “You need to be conscious of the snacks you choose.” Sugary, sticky treats are not good for teeth. The food is more likely to adhere to the tooth, and the sugar promotes decay. Healthier snacks, including vegetables and nuts, are recommended.

So is water. “Increase the amount



Pregnancy gingivitis, as the condition is called, makes gums more sensitive because estrogen and progesterone hormones have increased. The gums will often look red, swollen and inflamed, and the condition, which usually appears in the first trimester, can become worse if the bacteria is left along the gum line.

of water you drink during pregnancy,” advises Dr. Coles. “This will help with your saliva and reduce the chances of decay.” It’s also helpful to rinse your mouth with water after snacking.

Moms and babies also need more calcium and vitamin D during the development of the fetus. There is a misconception that the baby can draw away or “steal” calcium from the mother’s teeth. This is not the case, says Dr. Coles. “But the baby is growing and needs calcium. Increased calcium is always a good idea for moms and babies.”

#### Plan a check-up

A routine visit to the dentist during pregnancy is often best scheduled for the second trimester.

“This is the optimal time to perform any non-emergency dental treatment as the risk to the developing fetus is lessened and the discomfort of the mother in a reclined position is minimized,” says Dr. Manning.

Of course, once the little ones arrive, they’ll need to begin their own oral health care journey. It starts within the first year or within six months of that first baby tooth breaking through the skin. 🍏



# Little teeth, big importance

**When** that first tooth peeks through a tiny pink gum, it is a cause for celebration. Proud parents can take a photo for Facebook, upload a video to YouTube, and call grandparents with the good news about a small, white protuberance that marks a milestone in their child's life. Once the merriment abates, it's time to plan a visit to the dentist.

"The Canadian Dental Association recommends that a child should be seen by a dentist or oral health care provider by age one or within six months of the first tooth breaking through the gum," says Dr. Ross Anderson, chief of dentistry at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax.

The recommendation is founded on science. The most common infectious disease for children is early childhood caries, or tooth decay. A report released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information found that treatment of this disease was the most common reason for a child under the age of six to have a general anesthetic. "Treating the

infection that causes cavities accounts for 30 per cent of all day surgical time in Canadian hospitals for kids under six," says Dr. Anderson. "By age two, most kids have 16 teeth, some have all 20. It's not uncommon to see 10 of them with tooth decay and a child's first experience being a swollen infected face. It's what I live every day."

**Tooth decay—even in very new teeth—is common**

by Donalee Moulton

These statistics are likely underestimated because they do not include private dental clinics where children may be treated outside a hospital, adds Dr. Anderson, who is also head of the department of dental clinical services, division of pediatric Dentistry, at Dalhousie University's faculty of dentistry. "These statistics are very

## “The Canadian Dental Association

recommends that a child should be seen by a dentist or oral health care provider by age one or within six months of the first tooth breaking through the gum,” says Dr. Ross Anderson, chief of dentistry at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax



Marilyn Klein/Dental Instructional Resources, Faculty of Dentistry, Dalhousie University

concerning, particularly when we know this disease is preventable. We would prefer not to see the children in hospital to treat them. We would prefer that family dentists see these children and with parents prevent the disease from occurring.”

### Start early

One way for parents to alleviate their concern, and start their little one on a lifelong journey for good oral health care, is to visit the dentist before they turn one year old. “We know if we see kids within the first year any problems can be identified early and strategies can be put in place if there is a problem,” says Dr. Anderson. The science also shows that there is an incredible cost saving associated with this preventive approach.

Baby teeth are the building blocks for healthy teeth for life. Not only are they necessary to help children chew and

speak properly, but also their roots help guide the proper growth and positioning of adult teeth as these grow in. The Nova Scotia Dental Association notes that although baby teeth fall out and get replaced by permanent teeth, they are vital to a child’s oral development.

During that first visit to the dentist, several things will happen. The dentist will conduct a risk assessment to determine if the infant is likely to have problems later on and identify the frequency of follow-up visits, says Dr. Anderson.

The tool includes looking at everything from the child’s snacking habits to if they go to bed at night with a bottle. Asking parents about their oral health is also important. Dental caries are infectious. If the parent or caregiver has this problem, it’s likely the child will as well. “We need to have a conversation about strategies. It’s similar to a well-baby visit,” he says. “The goal is to prevent cavities and significantly reduce the burden of disease.”

The dentist will take a medical history, a social history and a family history. “Forty per cent of the time with this disease, there is a genetic connection,” says Dr. Anderson.

### Risk factors

There are 120 risk factors for tooth decay, including premature births, which put children at higher risk of tooth decay, but only three of the risk factors that can be addressed directly by parents. This includes ensuring good oral health nutrition. Water, for example, is the best drink for little ones to have between meals. While fruit juice may sound healthy, it is full of sugar that can eat into

a child’s teeth. Brushing is another issue. For children under three years of age, a dab of fluoridated toothpaste the size of a grain of rice is all that’s needed.

### First exam

After taking the history and completing the risk assessment, the dentist will also look inside your child’s mouth. White chalky areas on a tooth, for example, can signal the beginning of a cavity. Once the exam is finished, there is an opportunity to sit with parents, review the findings, and discuss next steps.

An infant’s first visit to the dentist does more than enable the dentist to examine the child and take a history. It also gives the little one an early opportunity to become accustomed to going to the dentist. “It helps the child feel comfortable and build in regular oral health care,” says Dr. Anderson. Your child may fuss; however, parents may be surprised at how accepting infants can be when the dentist examines them. They may actually enjoy the attention and the novelty of the visit.

As well, that first visit enables the dentist and the parent(s) to have a discussion about teething, non-nutritive sucking habits, including use of a pacifier and thumb sucking, and prevention of dental trauma. It may be helpful to bring another adult along so you can spend some time with the dentist talking about your infant’s oral health. You should also bring an extra diaper and snack for your child as well as a favourite toy. You might even want to mark the special occasion later with a photo on Facebook. 📸

### Knee-to-knee exam

Infants and young children don’t use a dentist’s chair. A special process called a knee-to-knee exam is used instead. Here’s how this works:

- The parent sits in a chair with the child on their lap. The child faces the parent.
- The dentist sits facing the parent, knees touching.
- The infant is tilted back. Their head is now in the dentist’s lap, but the parent has control over the child’s arms and legs.
- The dentist can see easily into the child’s mouth, and the child can see both their parent and the dentist.



It is helpful if you have information at hand when you visit your dentist, and if you have questions it's useful to write these down in advance.

# No more “grin and bear it”

Preparation makes all the difference with your first dental visit

by Donalee Moulton

**Going** to the dentist should be as comfortable for you as going to the mall. But unlike a spontaneous shopping spree, if you are visiting your dentist, especially a new dentist, it is best to prepare for the visit before you go.

## How to prepare

It is helpful if you have information at hand when you visit your dentist, and if you have questions, it's useful to write these down in advance. Information that dentists need include a list of current medications and where you get your medications filled. This ensures that any future prescriptions the dentist may prescribe can be checked for drug interactions. A list of allergies is also important so that these can be put in your patient chart.



Dr. Margot Hiltz, a dentist in St. John's, NL.

Your dentist will also appreciate receiving any previous dental records and x-rays. "This is helpful especially if the past work was complicated," says Dr. Margot Hiltz, a dentist in St. John's, NL. "The records alert us to any areas that should be monitored or have the potential for complications."

A contact list of other medical and health professionals with whom you work, such as physiotherapists and medical specialists, is also beneficial. This will help the dentist to better understand your overall health. Care provider information should also be provided, for those who require assistance in maintaining their overall health.

### In an emergency

If your dental visit is an emergency visit, your dentist will want to know the following:

- Is there pain?
- When did the pain start?
- What type of pain is being experienced? Is it a dull ache? Sharp pain? Throbbing?
- Is there swelling? If so, when did the swelling start?
- Have any medications been prescribed by another health professional?

All this information is important for your dentist—and for your optimal oral health. Once you begin your discussion with your dentist, your dentist will also want to know more than your physical history and health status. "It is helpful to know about the patient's goals, their overall attitude toward dental care and treatment, and their level of comfort in receiving dental care," says Dr. Hiltz.

### Strategies for success

Be sure to take any medications as usual,

unless otherwise specified, before your dental treatment. A good night's sleep before a dental visit and eating well are also things you can do to prepare for your appointment, especially if you are a little nervous. Dr. Hiltz also recommends using the first visit to determine your comfort level with the dentist. "The dentist/patient relationship is a personal one," she notes. "We are often dealing with people when they feel vulnerable. Developing a trusting relationship with your dentist can help with reducing dental anxiety."

Many adults are nervous about going to the dentist. Sharing this concern with your dentist can help to make you more comfortable so you can work together to

more frequently or do you want a few minutes to rest after the filling has been completed."

Of course, she adds, medications and other forms of sedation such as intravenous and general anesthetic are also available for those patients with whom other strategies are not effective.

The time of your appointment is also an important consideration. "Early morning time slots are often best for nervous patients," says Dr. Hiltz. "First thing in the morning, there is less opportunity for the dentist to be running behind, and you are left with less time in the day to worry about the upcoming appointment."



The Canadian Dental Association recommends bringing your children to the dentist by age one or when the first teeth begin to erupt.

alleviate your concerns. For instance, a distraction is often helpful if you find the noises during treatment unpleasant; you can bring your iPod with you and listen to some of your favourite music. Simple things like wearing comfortable clothing can also help make the experience a bit more enjoyable.

It's important to remember that despite your nervousness, you do have a lot of control during your dental visit. You can raise your hand if you want the dentist to stop for a moment or are experiencing any pain. "As well," says Dr. Hiltz, "it is important to keep your dentist informed about the progress of the visit and if changes need to be made to make you more comfortable. For example, would you like suction

For patients with aggressive gag reflexes, however, an afternoon appointment may be better. Dr. Hiltz often finds that the gag reflex is often less aggressive later in the day than first thing in the morning.

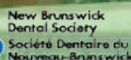
Beginning your relationship with your dentist at an early age is also an important way to reduce dental anxiety. The Canadian Dental Association recommends bringing your children to the dentist by age one or when the first teeth begin to erupt. This allows the trust relationship to be at an early age, which is beneficial if or when dental treatment becomes necessary.

A little advance preparation can go a long way to having a productive and comfortable visit with the dentist. 🍎

**Ten years is pretty  
good for a \$30,000 car,  
with the occasional  
checkup and oil  
change.**

**But it doesn't have near the mileage as that dental  
crown your dentist made 20 years ago for \$900.**

*What value do you place on your oral health?*





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