



**PEDRO
COSME DDS**

PROSTHODONTICS DEPARTMENT
MALO CLINIC

DENTAL MEDICINE

FIRST TIME APPOINTMENT AND TREATMENT PLAN

I need dental treatment; now what?

The decision-making process of seeking dental treatment often occurs in the aftermath of a traumatic event demanding immediate attention, like a toothache, a dental fracture (specially of the anterior teeth), an infection or a dental abscess, facial edema or mobile teeth. Moreover, most of the times these events come in the worst possible time, causing inevitably immediate loss of quality of life, missing school or work, bad sleep or even unnecessary visits to the hospital.

The next step is generally an appointment on the nearest available dental office for an emergency pain-relief treatment, with no real time for planning.

Ideally, in order to avoid this kind of unpleasant and unpredictable surprises, or right after solving them in the quickest and painless possible way, you should seek proper rightfully planned dental treatment. For this kind of planning you need to think ahead, projecting all the right clinical steps, in the correct sequence, predicting the time and the appointments needed, exactly in the same way an architect starts planning by drawing a blueprint or preparing a scale model, or as an engineer starts a project, right before starting to build any kind of construction. In the same way that no construction may start without a budget, a tender dossier or a set of specifications, the dentist is supposed to give the patient a planification of all the work needed and a prediction of costs.

Also, even before starting any planification, any architect or engineer needs to know deeply the terrain where they will lay their work. In the same way, the dentist should have a precise diagnostic of all the problems the patient may have and know thoroughly the anatomy and the condition of their teeth and bone.

Finally, as the constructors need to know their objectives to project a building that meets its future owner's demands, either housing, offices or factory, for instance, the dentist needs to know his patient's expectations, ambitions and dreams to draw a perfect project for his or hers smile.

A precise diagnostic and a perfect and carefully designed treatment plan are of paramount importance for an adequate management of all of the patient's dental problems to begin with, will prevent future problems and help with a long term maintenance of a perfect oral health and a beautiful smile for many years. Failing to plan is quite often planning to fail.

An adequate phase-in saves time, work and money, reducing the number of consultations needed and rationalizing the money spent in the softest way possible, allowing the patient to organize his appointments without harming work or family time.

Then, what is done in that first appointment?

Ideally, the following steps should be followed:

- clinical history and observation
- diagnostic
- medical interview
- treatment plan.

Although there are a few different parts for this consult, there is a logical sequence to be followed. Nowadays, there is such a great level of sophistication on Dentistry, and the kind of treatments are so specialized and diversified that is of the greatest importance that this treatment planning appointment is done by a dentist and a whole team of great experience and knowledge not only in planification but also in the actual execution of the treatments. It is equally essential that the dentist in this appointment bears a deep and broad comprehension of all the specialities of Dentistry but also of all the areas of Medicine that may be cause or consequence of dental problems, such as ear nose and throat, digestive, muscular and articular and even cardiology, plastic and esthetic surgery, dermatology and oncology.

What exams and informations does the dentist need for a correct diagnostic?

To obtain a correct diagnostic it is mandatory to know everything inside out about the patient, his mouth and his general health. Science evolved so much that there is an enormous variety of diagnostic tools and it is of paramount importance that the dentist manages them all with accuracy.

The first step is always to thoroughly collect the patient's medical history, his past and present diseases, all the medication taken and all of his allergies.

Next step is to collect oral and dental information: a panoramic radiograph is mandatory, because it gives the dentist a broad and general view of teeth and bone. Whenever there are missing teeth a 3D tomography is necessary, to assess the volume and quality of bone for implant placement. Small intra-oral dental radiographs can also be made to detect cavities, fractures, infections and evaluate old restorations. To obtain the best image definition with the lowest dosis of radiation possible, all exams radiologic exams should be digital.

After gathering all this personal and medical information plus the radiologic exams, it's time to start the actual clinical observation. We begin with the teeth, both their state and their position, gums and all the inside of the mouth (tongue, cheeks and salivary glands) and of the face (lips, muscles and joints). Dental occlusion is assessed; this means that we evaluate teeth contacts, their position and alignment (or misalignment) and maxillary position and the relation between the jaws to assure they allow a correct mastication or not. This is an essential assessment, since occlusal disorders (or malocclusion) can lead to parafunctional habits, like grinding, bruxism, bad posture, balance, back and neck problems, headaches and migraines. An incorrect or dysfunctional mastication can lead to poor food digestion, leading to gastric reflux, heartburn, increased oral acidity, increasing tooth erosion and wear, tooth fractures, loss of tooth and gum support and dentin hypersensitivity. Also, respiration must be addressed; mouth breathing syndrome may lead to frequent respiratory infections, increasing the chance of dental, periodontal and occlusal problems.

Eventually, with all this information collected, we have enough data for a correct diagnosis and are able to draw an ideal treatment plan.

What do we have to consider when planning a treatment?

After completing the intra-oral observation and radiographic exam, we begin a small interview by questioning the patients on what are their goals and objectives, so that a personalized and individualized treatment plan can be drawn, suiting each own needs and expectations, in order to improve not only the patient's smile but also its self-esteem, confidence and quality of life.

Generally, the present smile is evaluated first; we try to acknowledge the degree of satisfaction the patient has on one's smile: shape, size, colour, position and alignment of the dentition. Afterwards, we must try to understand their taste, what is for him a good smile. The general idea is to solve the patient's problems and diseases as much as possible, improving his quality of life but always suiting his hopes and expectations.

However, a treatment plan is not only a list of works and treatments to be done. It is essential to determine a logical and feasible sequence and phase-in, on that allows the treatment to be executed swiftly but without interfering much with his daily, weekly or monthly routine, and also accordingly to it personal and financial possibilities. It may sometimes be necessary to perform several treatments of different specialities in the same day, to optimize resources and monetize time, anesthesia, enhancing recovery time and reducing the pain and discomfort after each set of treatments. Other treatments must be scheduled with certain intervals between them in order to allow healing and recovery time, or even laboratory-work time to take place. One patient might prefer short and more frequent appointments, early in the morning before work or late in the afternoon after school, while another one, because he lives distant from the clinic would rather spend a full day at the clinic and perform as much treatments as possible. A full plan can be completed in only a few long days, or it can be dispersed through several months or even years if it is financially easier for the patient. All this situations are possible, and virtually any plan completed in more than one way, choosing alt any time the most convenient way for each person.

In the same way, that can almost be said about the budget. Associated with every treatment plan there must be a budget, as accurate as possible. For every budget there must also be prepared an estimate of the costs and payments, and there can also be prepared a financial plan or a banking credit simulation, to be suitable with the patient's possibilities and expectations.

What if I cannot execute the submitted plan?

No plan is closed or exclusive, there is always another way. If, for any reason, the presented plan is not suitable for the patient there must be presented another option in the same appointment. If the patient only reaches that conclusion later on, a new appointment can be scheduled, free of charge, so that the dentists can reassess and present a new option of treatment. Even a plan that has already been started but that for any reason can't be completed can be reappraised and reschedule every appointment to meet with the patient's demands. Every change is carefully reassessed and discussed between doctor and patient.

I finished my treatment plan; now what?

Any plan is prepared to solve the problems presented in any given moment. However long it may take, any plan's goal is to create the healthiest, most comfortable, functional and beautiful smile for as long as possible. That can be achieved not only by the treatment by itself but also through correct and regular maintenance appointments, together with a good oral hygiene care. The importance of a correct diagnostic is seen not only on the treatment by itself. Only by understanding how and what occurred before the treatment was necessary can make possible to prevent the occurrence of problems in the future. Always remember that we want patients to come to the clinic for the rest of their lives and not only during the execution of the treatment plan. That is the level of customer loyalty we are striving to very well deserve.