

# Holistic Oral Care - A Paradigm within Dentistry

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## Abstract

Holistic dentistry is based on the concept that the mouth and oral structures are an integrated part of the body. It emphasizes approaches to dental care considering dental health in the context of the patient's entire physical as well as emotional or spiritual health. The holistic concept believes that many conventional treatment modalities harm the body and disturb its equilibrium. For instance, a root canal procedure always leaves a localized infection in the jaw that negatively impacts the body's entire immune system. Holistic dentistry employs methods culled from other complementary approaches. Such alternative practices are now accepted as part of our spectrum of healthcare. The benefits of holistic dentistry are said to be the result of its incorporation of Ayurveda, hypnosis, homeopathy, aromatherapy, and nutrition. Despite facing lot of criticism, holistic dentistry is coming on strong, with a growing number of patients now seeking this kind of treatment and, in turn, many practitioners specializing in the practice.

**Key words:** Biocompatible dentistry, Biologic dentistry, Holistic dentist

## INTRODUCTION

The growing patient demand and a growing body of evidence that alternative treatments can be sought with good clinical outcomes had led to the emergency of "Holistic Dentistry." These alternative practices are now accepted as part of our spectrum of healthcare. Similar to alternative medical practitioners, holistic dentistry employs methods culled from other complementary approaches and reject some traditional procedures, especially the installation of amalgam "silver" fillings and root canals as it is perceived being potentially harmful or downright dangerous.<sup>[1]</sup>

Holistic dentistry, currently referred as "biological" or "biocompatible" dentistry, is based on the concept that the mouth and oral structures are an integrated part of

the body. It is a paradigm or a philosophy within dentistry. Holistic dentistry makes individuals live a healthier, more natural, and less toxic life. It bridges the gap between conventional clinical dentistry and natural healing modalities. A holistic dentist, understands the importance of exploring a patient's dental history as well, takes into consideration a patient's overall health recommending proper nutrition and other preventative measures to keep teeth and body healthy with the use of more natural and biocompatible dental materials.<sup>[2]</sup>

## ORIGIN

The concept of holistic dentistry developed in the late 1800s, when the National Dental Association recognized the harmful effects of mercury (amalgam) fillings. Further beginnings of holistic dentistry are linked to a 1925 article by the dentist Weston A. Price, a former director of research for the American Dental Association (ADA). Price claimed that such degenerative diseases as heart troubles, kidney and bladder disorders, arthritis, rheumatism, mental illness, lung problems, and several kinds of bacterial infections arise from root canal therapy or endodontics. Since the

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late 1800s, supporters of holistic dentistry continue to state their concerns regarding several procedures and recommendations of conventional dentistry including the use of fluoride in drinking water and in teeth cleansers. Morton Walker and Julian Whitmaker gave new insight into the hazards of modern dentistry, according to which, there may be several major types of dental problems that can cause illness or dysfunction in the body, including amalgam (mercury) fillings that typically contain 50% mercury silver, root canal treatment, cavitations or neuralgia-inducing cavitation osteonecrosis, and electro-oral galvanism from dissimilar metals.<sup>[3]</sup>

## HYPOTHESIS

The holistic concept believes that after a root canal procedure, a localized infection always remains in the tooth. This infection can negatively impact the body's entire immune system. Many chronic degenerative conditions, including neurological disorders, arthritis, and even cancer are attributed to localized dental infections from root canals. The mercury present in amalgam restorations can corrode and release mercury vapors into the brain and nervous system. Mercury is considered a toxic waste by the Environmental Protection Agency and has been known to contribute to numerous illnesses. If the extraction site of the tooth is not cleaned properly – or is done while a patient is ill – the cavitation (the cavity in the jawbone where the tooth was) can become a breeding ground for bacteria that lead to infection. Jaw and gum infections have been linked to heart disease, stroke, and other serious illnesses.<sup>[4]</sup>

## DEFINITION

Holistic dentistry is also known by other names such as biologic dentistry, alternative dentistry, unconventional dentistry, or biocompatible dentistry. The word “holistic” comes from “wholistic” meaning “the whole.” Holistic dentistry looks at the teeth in relation to the body as a whole. Holistic dentistry emphasizes approaches to dental care considering dental health in the context of the patient's entire physical as well as emotional or spiritual health.<sup>[5]</sup> It recognizes the connection between the teeth and the immune, nervous, and circulatory systems and therefore play a crucial role in helping to heal chronic illnesses by correcting the dental procedures that may have caused or aggravated them. Truly holistic dentists will educate patients on the importance of overall health and how dentistry can play a role in the overall health.<sup>[6]</sup> The Holistic Dental Network defines the field as: “An approach to dentistry that promotes health and wellness instead of the treatment of disease. This approach to dentistry encompasses both modern science and

knowledge drawn from the world's great traditions on natural healing. Holistic dentistry acknowledges and deals with the mind, body, and spirit of the patient, not just his or her teeth.<sup>[7]</sup>”

## PRINCIPLES

All holistic health-care models share basic philosophical foundations. They promote health and well-being through nourishment, elimination of toxins, and the promotion of physical, mental, and energetic balance. The four basic principles of holistic dentistry are (1) proper nutrition for the prevention and reversal of degenerative dental disease, (2) avoidance and elimination of toxins from dental materials, (3) prevention and treatment of dental malocclusion (bite problem and physical imbalance), and (4) prevention and treatment of gum disease at its biological basis.<sup>[8]</sup>

## MERITS

Holistic dentistry is said to be an emerging field of probiotic dental medicine – a type of medicine that supports the life process. Those who practice this form of biologic dentistry claim that it is esthetic, relatively nontoxic, and individually biocompatible or life supporting. A holistic dentist uses physiologic and electronic methods to locate areas of chronic disease that are difficult to locate by current standard methods. The benefits of holistic dentistry are said to be the result of its incorporation of Ayurveda, hypnosis, homeopathy, aromatherapy, and nutrition.<sup>[9]</sup>

## COMPONENTS

### Ayurveda Therapy

Ayurveda is one of the oldest systems of medicine from India, nearly 5000 years old. Ayurveda (meaning “science of life”) is an alternative medical system that emphasizes body, mind, and spirit remedies. Diet, exercise (yoga), meditation, herbs, massage, exposure to sunlight, and controlled breathing are used to treat and prevent disease.<sup>[10]</sup> Ayurvedic herbs have nature's own power of remedies. The right herb in the right combination keeps the body system in harmony. Formulated herbal tooth powder and paste are available that are very effective and safe for number of diseases. Ingredients are combined in such a way that helps in cleaning of teeth, and prevention from various dental problems such as dental pain, bleeding gums, mouth fibrosis due to poor eating habits or betel nut chewing habits, sensitive tooth, tobacco chewing habits, dental numbness, formation of tartar, and poor dental strength.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Hypnosis

When hypnosis is used, patients are able to relax their bodies and minds by concentrating on suggestions of relaxation. The patient is fully aware of what is happening during their treatment and no drugs are used. Many holistic dentists employ specialist hypnotherapists to provide treatment that is highly effective and cannot cause any harm or produce any side effects. There are various uses of hypnosis in dentistry: To eliminate fears of dental phobic patients, to relax the patients, to reduce bleeding, for controlling salivary flow, promote healing, prevent gagging, and for stoppage of habit such as thumb sucking or cheek biting.<sup>[12]</sup>

### Homeopathy

Homeopathy is used by holistic dentists as a natural approach to their practice. The therapy is a safe and natural alternative that is non-addictive and effective with both adults and children. Homeopathic remedies are used to improve the psychological or emotional condition of patients without the drugging effects of conventional tranquilizers. The three main remedies considered by holistic dentists include aconite (foxglove); gelsemium (yellow jasmine); and argentum nitricum (silver nitrate). Clinical experience has also demonstrated that many homeopathic remedies have been found to be effective for conditions, especially dental caries, dental abscess, oral lesions, postextraction bleeding, and even medications to treat the anxious and nervous child.<sup>[13]</sup>

### Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy uses the pure oil essences from plants and flowers that act as hormone-like stimulants to improve a patient's health balance. They are natural and gentle, oils such as lavender, bergamot, sandalwood, and basil are beneficial in their power to soothe, relax, and calm.<sup>[14]</sup> When an inhaled aromatic molecule fits into the right receptor, a message or recognition is sent through the olfactory nerve directly into the limbic system in brain. This causes an immediate response of like or dislike as well as being able to smell the odor. Besides affecting the nervous and hormonal systems, different aromas can also trigger immediate positive feelings.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Nutrition

Holistic approach believes that stress and tension are often linked to diet. Dietary excesses or deficiencies increase the body's needs for essential vitamins and minerals, and the stress and tension accelerate any fear or phobias of the patient.<sup>[16]</sup> Malnutrition can also intensify the severity of oral infections and may lead to their evolution into life-threatening diseases. It is well known to increase the severity of oral mucosal lesions and periodontal diseases and is a contributing factor to

life-threatening NOMA.<sup>[17]</sup> Under nutrition is associated with developmental defects of the enamel that increase susceptibility to dental caries. Controlling the intake of sugars remains important for caries prevention. Research has consistently shown that when the intake of free sugars is <15 kg/person/year, the level of dental caries is low. A diet high in starchy staple foods, fruits, and vegetables and low in free sugars and fat will protect both oral and general health.<sup>[18]</sup>

### Botanical Medicine and Herbal Medicine

Holistic dentistry may use herbs to promote relaxation. The sedative properties of chamomile, lime flower, vervain, rosemary, and valerian are relied upon in place of conventional drugs.<sup>[19,20]</sup>

## HOLISTIC DENTAL ASSOCIATION

In 1978 concerned, dedicated dentists who came together to share their common interest in treatment modalities that were not included in dental school curriculum founded the Holistic Dental Association. Some of these modalities were very new and others were very old; the one thing that they shared in common was they offered additional options for treatment. These dentists established this organization to provide a forum for the development and sharing of health promoting therapies. With its formation, a shift to treat the entire patient's health needs is emerging from dentists, dental hygienists, and health-care practitioners from all fields who endorse these ideas to a consideration of the attitudes and feelings of the patient.<sup>[7]</sup>

### GOAL

The main goals of a holistic dentist include identifying areas that need treatment and providing treatment to patients that will not create stress. Holistic dentists work in conjunction with other health-care providers to investigate whether a hidden infection of dental origin exists, and whether it may be the source of or contributing factor to overall health problems. A biological approach to dentistry ensures the use of treatment and therapies that cause the least disturbance to the immune system. To determine the appropriate method of treatment, a holistic dentist must thoroughly review the patient's medical and dental background.<sup>[7]</sup>

### CONTROVERSY

The ADA does not endorse holistic dentistry and their disparagement can be understood by their statement *“Unconventional dentistry” is defined as encompassing*

*scientifically unproven practices and products that do not conform to generally accepted dental practices or “conventional” methods of evaluation, diagnosis, prevention, and/or treatment of diseases, conditions, and/or dysfunctions relating to the oral cavity and its associated structures. The dental profession advocates an evidence-based approach to oral health care that requires the judicious integration of systematic assessments of clinically relevant scientific evidence.*<sup>21</sup>” David Kennedy, DDS, past President of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology, says “All dentistry should be evidence based,” promoting scientific research on biocompatible dentistry (basically, the avoidance of toxic compounds in dental materials).

Controversy and debate have arisen over the years regarding the use of alternative health practices in holistic dentistry as critics claim that many of these practices involve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment outside of the scope of dentists.

## CONCLUSION

The face of dentistry is changing with the practitioner’s approach to patient health. To this end, holistic dentistry is coming on strong, with a growing number of patients now seeking this kind of treatment and, in turn, more practitioners specializing in the practice. Proper knowledge and understanding about the holistic approach are of utmost importance to effectively put in and use this phenomenon of holism in clinical dental practice. In India, fraudulently unqualified medical practitioners have practiced holistic medicine widely since many decades; it is the time that holistic approach is assessed meticulously by evidence-based dentistry and if found beneficial should be incorporated in day-to-day dental procedures.

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