



Holistic Dentistry – Keeping Your Body Healthy

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Have you wrestled with the problem of finding physicians and dentists whose practice values align with your own focus on energy and healing — yet work with insurance?

This process can be especially difficult when you are looking for a dentist.

This article provides an actionable resource guide to help you find practitioners who will provide you and your family with the holistically-focused (and high-quality) oral-health care you want, while respecting your overall health. Basic holistic and functional-medicine awareness among health consumers is growing, and dentistry is responding — slowly — to the consumer demand. The term “functional medicine” is gradually eclipsing terms like “integrative,” “complementary” and “alternative.” It emphasizes discovering and eliminating the root cause(s) of disease, not just treating its symptoms (as mainstream medicine and dentistry currently do).

Accordingly, functional medicine places a priority on nutrition, diet and avoidance of/removal of toxins for good oral and whole-body health. In fact, functional medicine physicians (like Dr. Mark Hyman, author of *Food*) and their dental counterparts (like Dr. Steven Lin, author of *The Dental Diet*) have been promoting the concept of “Food as Medicine.” This cause-based, toxin-removing, nutrient-based philosophy is slowly

working its way into holistic dentistry. Cutting-edge holistic dentists are embracing nutrition (or lack of it) as one major root cause of oral health or disease.

Another critical piece is the microbiome (the specific bacterial population in your mouth, gut or any other body system). Based on how well you are treating your body through your diet and — we hope — your energy-supportive lifestyle, the ‘bugs’ in your mouth can have a healthy or unhealthy balance. Holistically-focused dentists will offer salivary testing for good and bad bacteria, and other measures of oral and whole-body health — this is a key area to explore when you are asking questions of prospective dentists.

The reality is that one-stop shopping for holistic oral care may be challenging. The good news: this is changing. . . but slowly.

Debate, Polarization, and Science

Unfortunately, science and medicine are subject to political, corporate and financial influences, which often obscure actionable information. Controversial, polarizing dental topics — like fluoride, mercury toxicity and root canals are examples. Typically, two completely opposing viewpoints, with varying credibility, both claim to be right. Telltale terms like “pseudoscience,” personal attacks on certain authors and researchers, and a particularly hostile brand of alleged



‘skepticism in the name of science’ are clear indicators of a polarized topic. Skepticism is crucial to scientific thought. However, skepticism and polarization are two very different things. Some viewpoints about holistic dentistry are ongoing polarized debates. The resources given here will help you get to what really matters — better overall wellness through better oral health.

What is Holistic Dentistry?

Terminologies tend to overlap. Holistic dentistry is sometimes used as though synonymous with “biologic,” “biological” or “biocompatible” dentistry, focusing on how oral health impacts the entire body’s biologi-

Bottom line: you want to find a dentist who understands the basics of functional medicine, root causes of disease, the importance of nutrition and the microbiome and how the health of your mouth impacts whole-body health. Any dentist can use the term “holistic” — it does not mean he or she has the knowledge, training or experience you need to keep your mouth and body optimally healthy. So, please focus more on concepts than on terminology — see the checklist below and the list of web resources at the end of this article for some key concepts and actionable information. Base your questions for your prospective dentist accordingly.

Basic holistic and functional-medicine awareness among health consumers is growing, and dentistry is responding.

cal processes, starting with (or sometimes manifesting in) the mouth. It looks like ‘biologic(al)’ or ‘functional’ dentistry/oral health will emerge as the standard terminology, whereas ‘holistic’ could be more dated and, in some cases, less scientifically specific.

But how different is holistic/biologic/functional dentistry, really? According to an article on *DentistryIQ.com* (DIQ),¹ biological dentists use natural therapies in combination with conventional ones, to better prevent, detect and treat oral diseases — and consider a patient’s entire state of physical and emotional health and wellness. I agree — and would add that this includes the energetic balancing of your body and considering how proper function of energy meridians that intersect your mouth and teeth may critically affect other body systems and predispose to health or disease.

While some serious, cutting-edge dental and medical societies speak in terms of “biologic” or “biological” concepts, others that are just as knowledgeable (sometimes in different areas) do not. Instead they prioritize whole-body-health concepts, like medical-dental interdisciplinary collaboration, the importance of good breathing, sleep and good airway health.

Non-toxic Consciousness

Biologic dentistry focuses on minimizing toxicity in the body. Societies like the International Academy of Biological Dentistry and Medicine (IABDM) and International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT) are working progressively to standardize doctors’ and patients’ education about exposure to a dental procedure or material — and the consequences.

The terms “mercury-free” and “mercury-safe” are popular (and mean different things, see below) even among doctors who do not use the terms “holistic” or “biologic.” Dentists are ‘getting it’ that mercury is not good for business, which is a powerful motivator for change in a revenue-driven field like dentistry. They are also grasping that mercury is not good for health, either — this includes not only their patients, but the office staff and dentists themselves.

More and more patients are talking with their dentists about the unsightliness and possible health hazards of amalgam fillings. Dental amalgam is a mixture of powdered metals that contains mostly silver, along with copper and tin, mixed with mercury — a metal that is liquid at room temperature and is a known toxin in a number of its different chemical forms. A



finished dental amalgam in the mouth consists of about 50% mercury. The American Dental Association still maintains that amalgam is safe.² Much of the published science argues that it is not.³⁻⁸

The IAOMT position statement, and supporting article^{9, 10} also present convincing evidence that mercury — in dental amalgam and elsewhere — is unsafe.

Both the IAOMT and IABDM sites offer huge amounts of actionable information for your holistic-dental search.

Choosing the All-Around Best Dentist For You

While awareness of what is biologically supportive and nontoxic to the human body is essential, you must also assess an individual dentist's basic — and advanced — technical dental expertise, and scope of continuing education. A good way to find out is to ask your prospective dentist about his or her membership, fellowship, mastership and board certification by professional dental societies like the Academy of General Dentistry,¹¹ the American Academy of Implant Dentistry,¹² as well as the holistically-focused societies mentioned above. While societies like Academy of General Dentistry do not overtly advertise a holistic-biologic-functional focus (because dentistry as a whole does not yet present itself that way... hence, your search), some do align themselves by offering continuing education on cutting-edge concepts like airway, sleep apnea, progressive orthodontics with newer appliances and others — as well as traditional skills like restorative dentistry. Use these societies and the continuing education hours your prospective dentist has taken and been certified by as a benchmark to assess his or her *sheer dental expertise*, which is just as important to your health as a functional-biologic-holistic focus.

The Holistic Dentist Checklist

Ideally, the holistic dentist, or dentists, you hire should embody, project or embrace:

- Good personal health... does the dentist look healthy, well and fit?
- Will they assess your entire body — not just your

teeth and gums?

- Do they do an in-depth evaluation of your overall health and medical history and take your vital signs — *blood pressure at the very least*?
- Are they mercury and toxic metal free (do not use amalgam, nickel or other nonprecious metal fillings to restore teeth?)
- ... AND mercury-safe (Do they use an accepted mercury-safe amalgam removal system and discuss replacing amalgam with a healthier material?)
- Do they understand the importance of nutrition and diet to the microbiome and oral health?
- Do they help you deal with payments, dental insurance and utilize medical-dental billing/cross-coding?
- Do they demonstrate and maintain skill at restorative and preventive dentistry, through certifications from recognized professional societies and continuing-education providers?^{11, 12}
- Are they willing to consult with your primary-care physician or specialist? Conversely, choosing a *physician* who consults with your dentist is equally important — and may be harder to find than a good holistic dentist.
- Do they work with other dental specialties for interdisciplinary care, looking at the whole picture of your dental and overall health, not just focusing on the “work” the individual dentist can perform for you?
- Do they use digital x-ray equipment for less radiation?
- Do they go beyond talking about basic oral hygiene to cover such topics as the impact of overall diet (not just sugar) on oral health or disease?
- Do they work with an *orofacial myofunctional* therapist (also known as an orofacial myologist; see resource at end of article)
- Do they offer periodontal pathogen testing to assess periodontal disease?
- Do they offer salivary DNA testing to assess the health of your oral microbiome?
- Do they offer screening (using CBCT x-ray) for airway, breathing, sleep, snoring and sleep apnea issues?



The Critical Airway/Sleep-Apnea Connection

You will also want to find a practitioner who, in addition to a holistic/biologic/functional-medicine approach, realizes the huge epidemic of sleep apnea and sleep-breathing issues and focuses on screening for them. Caution: dentists who are not holistically-focused often practice ‘dental sleep medicine’ but may not have adequate training or experience to diagnose or treat airway/breathing/sleep issues. The office should have a cone-beam computed tomography (CBCT) x-ray machine, which creates detailed, three-dimensional images that provide invaluable clues about how improper breathing could be affecting your overall health.

Health, Disease, and Your Power as a Consumer

Evolution within any profession is usually characterized by an intense resistance to change and dentistry is no exception.

The U.S. has the world’s largest per-capita chronic disease burden. Mainstream medicine and dentistry focus on treatment more than on prevention. Dentistry is historically focused on performing procedures — most of which involve restoring teeth that have been destroyed by dental decay or treating periodontal disease (both of which are epidemics), rather than forming a systemic diagnostic picture of the whole body. Your search for a dentist with a broader vision empowers you to transform this culture.

Dental Insurance

Unlike medical coverage, a patient’s dental insurance will only pay about \$1,500/year — a limit that remains unchanged since the 1970s. Even moderately extensive dental work can exceed \$10,000, mostly out-of-pocket. Holistic dentistry is also typically more expensive and may not accept dental insurance.

But there is good news on the dental insurance front. The inception of new billing methods, called “cross-coding” or “dental-medical billing (DMB)” is beginning to change insurance reimbursement such that some dental procedures can be covered under medical insurance. Most dental practices, holistic or

not, are unfamiliar with this new system. However, as a patient, you can help by pointing the dentist to the site Dental-Medical Billing University (especially if he/she does not believe DMB is for real),¹³ and see Christine Taxin’s *DentistryIQ* article for your own DMB research.¹⁴

Collaboration Is Key

As you may have noticed, medical and dental professionals do not like to collaborate, other than through the occasional referral.

Collaboration *between physicians and dentists* happens only rarely. Finding a holistic/biologic/functional dentist and physician who will actively collaborate with each other — and you — is a key piece of your holistic-dental care puzzle. As the health-care culture evolves to change this, the organizations described above are your best resource in pulling together your collaborative health-care team — please explore them! €



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Holistic Dental Resources

The Holistic Dental Association (HDA) www.holisticdental.org/find-a-holistic-dentist is the country's oldest holistic dental society. Its primary goals are 1) to teach and to learn; 2) to provide information and guidance to those persons seeking to participate in their own health care, and 3) to help in the continuing education of practitioners who have a desire to expand their knowledge and awareness.

The International Academy of Biological Dentistry and Medicine (IABDM) www.iabdm.org/about-the-iabdm is a network of dentists, physicians and allied health professionals that seeks to promote “a more informed dentistry” through biological dental medicine utilizing non-toxic diagnostic and therapeutic approaches, as well as biocompatible restorative dental procedures based on scientific knowledge of energy, electromagnetics, sound, light, acupuncture, homeopathy and nutrition. It emphasizes dentists networking with other doctors in a variety of fields and has a list of these practitioners.

The International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT), www.iabdm.org/about-the-iabdm and www.iaomt.org/intro-articles-biological-dentistry is “a global network of dentists, health professionals, and scientists who research the biocompatibility of dental products, including the risks of mercury fillings, fluoride, root canals and jawbone osteonecrosis.” The IAOMT pursues its mission of protecting public health and the environment by funding and promoting relevant research on scientifically valid non-invasive therapies, and educating medical and dental professionals, policy makers and the general public.

The American Academy of Physiological Medicine and Dentistry (AAPMD), www.aapmd.org/about is “an inclusive organization for health care practitioners and health care consumers to share information and work together for the wellness of individuals, families and society.” Its goal is a collaborative global health focus on disease prevention, early intervention and wellness. Importantly, AAPMD's reach extends to not only to dentists, physicians and health therapists, but

to consumers as well. Its goal is a collaborative global health focus on disease prevention, early intervention and wellness. This offers you unprecedented access to holistically-focused providers and consumers seeking the same thing you are. Note that AAPMD does not focus on terms like “holistic” or “biologic” — but rather on concepts.

The American Academy for Oral Systemic Health (AAOSH), www.aaosh.org/about/aaosh-mission is “an organization of health care leaders and health professionals dedicated to the relationship of oral health and whole-body health.” Its goal — through focus on changing consumers, medical AND dental professionals' awareness of the mouth-body connection — is for preventive health to be “the new norm” by 2025 and sees oral-systemic health as “the next big movement in healthcare.” Again, AAOSH does not focus on terms like “holistic” or “biologic” — but rather on concepts and key principles, like ‘oral-systemic health.’

The American College for Advancement in Medicine (ACAM) www.acam.org/?page=AboutACAM is “dedicated to educating physicians and other health care professionals on the safe and effective application of integrative medicine.” Its healthcare model focuses on prevention of illness with the goal of total wellness. While ACAM's approach is more from the physicians' side of the health-care 'aisle,' the Academy's membership includes dentists, who post regularly on its excellent Integrative Medicine Blog.

The International Association of Orofacial Myology, www.iaom.com/faq is a society of practitioners (orofacial myofunctional therapists, or orofacial myologists) who focus on proper development of the mouth, face, jaws, airway, teeth and bite, and can identify and treat problems in these areas early on in a child). The OMT is a key player on the functional-biologic dental team; unfortunately, most dentists are unfamiliar with OMTs and their valuable expertise.

The Institute for Functional Medicine works “to advance the highest expression of individual health by advocating Functional Medicine as the standard of care.” Learn more at www.ifm.org/about.



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