

Ask a Medical Expert:

Answers to all your Health and Wellness Concerns

Dental

Q I purchased a Uni-Care 200 dental plan to get the discounted prices for dental care, since I'm a widow and not covered under my husband's insurance anymore. The dentist I switched to says I need a crown replacement and suggested a 2750 crown at \$880, not the 2751 crown that's discounted to \$567 in my plan, and says the 2750 crown is guaranteed for life and better. What is the difference between these two procedures, and is it really worth the extra money?

A. The difference between the 2750 and the 2751 crowns is the metal substructure upon which the porcelain is baked. The 2750 crown has a precious metal (mostly gold) foundation; while the 2751 restoration contains a non-precious alloy under the esthetic porcelain. Both crowns are very functional, but the 2750 is kinder to the gum tissue. It has been documented that oftentimes some patients exhibit a localized pseudo-allergic response to some metal in the non-precious alloy (possibly nickel). This also has been noted in patients having porcelain fused to precious metals. This reaction manifests itself with gingival irritation, redness or purple discoloration; the tissue adjacent to the exposed metal looks "angry" with bleeding and puffiness. Not everyone shows this reaction, but we at Always Great Smiles have noticed this to be evident in mostly the female population between the ages of 35 and 70. Because of this, we have abandoned the porcelain fused to metal restorations and replaced them primarily with all-ceramic Zirconia as substructure covered with porcelain. We have all but eliminated this gingival response. If your choices are between the precious and non-precious metal substructures only, we believe that the 2750 precious metal porcelain crown would be your better option.

Patrick A. Pecora, DDS, Always Great Smiles

Dermatology

Q I've never had a problem with acne, and when I was pregnant my face was clear. But ever since I had my baby I have had horrible acne. What causes it? What can I do about it? Is it hard to treat?

A. Acne is a very common skin condition, and I see and treat hundreds of men and women every year with this problem. Although acne occurs most commonly during our teenage years, even patients in their 30s, 40s, or 50s can suffer from acne. All acne outbreaks start out the same way, regardless of patient age or gender: changes in the body's hormones cause skin cells to become "sticky" and clog up the pores, stopping the normal flow of skin oil. This first early lesion of acne is known as a whitehead or blackhead. Bacteria that lives normally on EVERYONES skin then feeds on this oily buildup and creates inflammation that leads to red, pus filled bumps and cysts.

All acne outbreaks begin with hormonal changes and that is why puberty, pregnancy, and stress can all cause acne to worsen. Because every person is different, not everyone will get acne the same way or at the same time in their life. Once your dermatologist evaluates your individual acne problem, they can successfully treat you with a combination of cleansers, topical creams, pills, chemical peels, and sometimes laser or light based devices. Acne can be hard to treat, but it is easier to deal with if you work with an expert who takes the time to learn about your skin and tailor a unique treatment approach just for your skin!

Alix J. Charles, MD, The Dermatology Institute

Obstetrics & Gynecology

Part 1:

Q What are the signs of perimenopause, and how will my period change as I approach menopause?

A. Perimenopause, or menopause transition refers to the time before menopause. Perimenopause usually starts a few years before menopause but can be as early as 10 years. It is nature's way of allowing your body to adjust to the major changes that occur in a woman's life with menopause.

During perimenopause ovaries gradually start fading. Menstrual blood flow during cycles becomes scanty and the interval between cycles increases and becomes irregular. Menopause, by definition, begins 12 months after the final menses.

Typical symptoms are similar to that of menopause but are less intense. These include hot flashes, insomnia, weight gain and bloating, mood changes, decreased libido, breast tenderness, urinary urgency and leakage.

Part 2:

Q What is the youngest and oldest patient you've ever had go through menopause?

A. In the United States the average age of women at menopause is 51 years. The most common age range is 48-55 years. Genetics has a strong influence at the age of menopause.

Although I have had patients enter menopause in the early twenties, onset younger than 40 years is considered premature and needs investigation. If it occurs at age older than 55 years it is a matter of concern as some of these women may be at risk for uterine cancer. You must see your gynecologist for both early and late menopause.

Naheed Akhter, MD, Women's OBGYN Associates

We are committed to addressing all the unique health issues of women. If you have a question, our health professionals have an answer. Please send your questions and concerns to ashleigh@suburbanwoman.net.

