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## X-Rays

Dental X-ray examinations provide valuable information that Dr. Rice could not collect otherwise. With the help of radiographs (the proper term for pictures taken with X-rays), he can look at what is happening beneath the visible oral tissues. They pose a far smaller risk than many undetected and untreated dental problems.

How do dental X-rays work?

When X-rays pass through your mouth during a dental exam, more X-rays are absorbed by the denser parts (such as teeth and bone) than by soft tissues (such as cheeks and gums) before striking the film. This creates an image on the radiograph. Teeth appear lighter because fewer X-rays penetrate to reach the film. Tooth decay, infections and signs of gum disease, including changes in the bone and ligaments holding teeth in place, appear darker because of more X-ray penetration. Dental restorations (fillings, crowns) may appear lighter or darker, depending on the type of material used for the restoration. The interpretation of these X-rays allows Dr. Rice to safely and accurately detect hidden abnormalities.

How often should X-rays be taken?

How often X-rays (radiographs) should be taken depends on the patient's individual health needs. It is important to recognize that just as each patient is different from the next, so should the scheduling of X-ray exams be individualized for each patient. Dr. Rice will review your history, examine your mouth and then decide whether you need radiographs and what type. If you are a new patient, he may recommend radiographs to determine the present status of the hidden areas of your mouth and to help analyze changes that may occur later. If you have had recent radiographs at your previous dentist, Dr. Rice may ask you to have the radiographs forwarded.

The schedule for needing radiographs at recall visits varies according to your age, risk for disease and signs and symptoms. Recent films may be needed to detect new cavities, or to determine the status of gum disease or for evaluation of growth and development. Children may need X-rays more often than adults. This is because their teeth and jaws are still developing and because their teeth are more likely to be affected by tooth decay than those of adults.

What are the benefits of a dental X-ray examination?

Many diseases of the teeth and surrounding tissues cannot be seen when Dr. Rice examines your mouth. An X-ray examination may reveal:

- small areas of decay between the teeth or below existing restorations (fillings);
- infections in the bone;
- periodontal (gum) disease;
- abscesses or cysts;
- developmental abnormalities;
- some types of tumors.

Finding and treating dental problems at an early stage can save time, money and unnecessary discomfort. It can detect damage to oral structures not visible during a regular exam. If you have a hidden tumor, radiographs may even help save your life.

What if I'm pregnant and need a dental X-ray?

An X-ray may be needed for dental treatment or a dental emergency that can't wait until after the baby is born. Untreated dental infections can pose a risk to the fetus, and dental treatment may be necessary to maintain the health of the mother and child. Radiation from dental X-rays is extremely low. However, every precaution is taken to minimize radiation exposure. A leaded apron minimizes exposure to the abdomen and should be used when any dental X-ray is taken. Dental radiographs are not contraindicated if one is trying to become pregnant or is breast feeding.