



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

GLOSSARY

check-up – an exam where a dentist or doctor considers one’s health and looks for any problems

* The last time I went in for a check-up, the doctor had my blood tested for cholesterol and glucose.

cleaning – the process of having a dental professional clean one’s teeth with special tools

* Our dentist says we should have a professional cleaning every six months.

wisdom tooth – one of four large teeth in the back of one’s mouth that usually appear in one’s late teens or early 20s

* How old were you when you got your wisdom teeth?

root canal – a painful procedure where a dentist takes out a damaged part of a tooth that is below the skin

* My mother says: If you don’t brush your teeth, you might need a root canal in the future.

nerve – a small part of one’s body that one cannot see, but that carries messages from another body part to one’s brain, sending information about touch, pain, and temperature

* Without nerves, we wouldn’t know what anything feels like.

cavity – a small hole in a tooth, usually caused by sugary food

* Most people can prevent cavities by brushing their teeth after eating.

molar – one of the large teeth without a pointed top in the back on one’s mouth, used for chewing (not biting)

* Young children get their molars after they get their front teeth.

filling – the small amount of metal placed in a cavity to cover the hole in one’s tooth and protect it from further damage

* The dentist told her she’d need to get two new fillings.

sensitivity – having a strong, often painful reaction to small changes in touch, pressure, or temperature

* His skin has high sensitivity to sunlight, so he must wear a hat and clothing to cover his body when he goes outside.



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

gums – the pink skin covering the bottom of one's teeth

* Her gums bleed whenever she brushes her teeth.

to recede – to move backward, pulling away from something else

* They watched the waters recede before low tide.

root – the part of a tooth or plant that is below the surface and cannot be seen

* When you re-plant the rose bush, make sure all the roots are covered with soil.

dental floss – a long piece of thin string that is held between one's fingers and moved between one's teeth to clean the area between them

* The dentist wants his patients to use dental floss every night before going to bed.

dental hygienist – a person who works with a dentist and whose job is to clean patients' teeth and teach them how to clean their own teeth better

* The dental hygienist will clean your teeth, but the dentist will look for any problem areas.

to brush – to clean one's teeth with a toothbrush; to move a small tool against one's teeth quickly to clean them, usually two to three times per day after eating.

* How old should a child be before learning to brush his or her own teeth?

buildup – accumulation; the addition of a little bit of material over a long period of time

* They haven't swept the floor in months, so there's a major buildup of dirt.

plaque – a thin layer of food and bacteria that covers one's teeth after eating and needs to be removed by cleaning regularly, or else it will damage one's teeth

* Brush two to three times per day to remove plaque.

tartar – a hard, yellow layer on one's teeth, created when one does not remove plaque regularly

* You can remove plaque with brushing, but only a dental professional can use special tools to remove tartar.

dentures – false teeth; fake teeth; a set of artificial teeth that one wears when one no longer has natural teeth, often because they had to be removed for health reasons

* Her teeth had so many problems that the dentist decided to remove them all and give her a set of dentures.



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these dental procedures may be the most painful?
 - a) Having one's wisdom teeth taken out.
 - b) Getting a check-up.
 - c) Brushing one's teeth.

 2. What causes cavities?
 - a) Fillings.
 - b) Receding gums.
 - c) Plaque and tartar.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

filling

The word “filling,” in this podcast, means the small amount of metal placed in a cavity to cover the hole in one’s tooth and protect it from further damage: “They gave their little girl too much candy and other sugary foods, and she already had seven cavities by the time she was 10 years old.” The word “filling” is also the food put inside a pie, sandwich, or pastry: “Her favorite doughnuts have a lemon filling.” The material inside a pillow is also called “filling”: He can’t use that pillow because it has a real feather filling and he’s allergic to feathers.” As an adjective, the word “filling” describes the full, satisfied feeling in one’s stomach after eating a lot of food: “That meal was really filling, so I don’t have room for dessert.”

gums

In this podcast, the word “gums” means the pink skin covering the bottom of one’s teeth: “His dentist recommends brushing not only the teeth, but also the gums.” “Chewing gum” or “bubble gum” is a sweet substance flavored with mint, cinnamon, or fruit that is put in one’s mouth and chewed but not swallowed: “If you can’t brush your teeth after lunch, a piece of sugar-free chewing gum can help keep your teeth clean.” As a verb, “to gum (something)” means to try to chew something when one doesn’t have teeth: “The seven-month-old baby doesn’t have teeth yet, but she likes to gum pieces of fruit.” Finally, the phrase “to gum (something) up” means to make a machine stop working by not letting the pieces move freely: “If you don’t clean your computer’s keyboard, dirt and food might gum up the keys.”



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

CULTURE NOTE

Many American children “get excited” (are happy about something) when their “baby teeth” (the first, temporary teeth one gets; non-permanent teeth) start to “wobble” (move). They know that when their tooth falls out, the “tooth fairy” will come to visit.

A “fairy” is a small, imaginary creature that looks like a woman, but has wings and can fly. The “tooth fairy” is a special fairy that comes into children’s rooms at night after their teeth have fallen out, “collecting” (taking and keeping) their teeth and leaving something for a child “in return” (in exchange for the tooth).

When a tooth falls out, the child puts it under his or her pillow before falling asleep. Some children have a small, special pillow with a small pocket just for holding teeth that they put underneath their regular pillow. In the middle of the night, the tooth fairy comes and takes the tooth away. “In its place” (where the tooth was), she leaves a small present. This might be a “sticker” (a small piece of paper with a pretty or interesting picture and a special glue on the other side so it can be attached to other things), candy, or a “coin” (a metal piece of money). “Nowadays” (in modern times), some kids get a few dollars for their teeth, but coins are probably still more “common” (usual; typical).

Of course, “there’s no such thing as” (nothing exists) the tooth fairy, but little children don’t know that. Their parents secretly do the tooth fairy’s work at night until the child is old enough to know what’s really happening.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 503: Seeing a Dentist.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 503. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions, comprehension questions, cultural notes, and, most importantly, a complete transcript of everything we say on this episode.

This episode is about doing something I love to do, going to see the dentist. It'll be a dialogue between Dr. Chung and Luis about some work that Luis needs to have done on his teeth. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Dr. Chung: Hello, Luis, I'm Dr. Chung. You're here for a check-up and a cleaning, is that right?

Luis: Yes, that's right.

Dr. Chung: Okay, let's take a look. Have you had your wisdom teeth taken out?

Luis: No, I haven't.

Dr. Chung: Hmm...You may need to do that soon. You've had a root canal?

Luis: Yes, about three years ago.

Dr. Chung: Does that hurt?

Luis: Ow!

Dr. Chung: I guess I hit a nerve. The bad news is that you may need another root canal soon. Let's see if you have any cavities. Oh, I think there's one here in your left molar. You'll need to come back for a filling. Are you experiencing any sensitivity?



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

Luis: Yes, I am!

Dr. Chung: I'm not surprised. Your gums have receded and some of the root is showing. Do you use dental floss?

Luis: Um, yes.

Dr. Chung: I'll have the dental hygienist show you how to brush and floss better so you can prevent the buildup of plaque and tartar. Any questions for me before the hygienist starts on your cleaning?

Luis: No, I'm just glad you didn't say I need dentures!

Dr. Chung: No, you don't. Not yet.

[end of dialogue]

Our episode begins with Dr. Chung introducing herself to her “patient,” the person she is taking care of, Luis. She says, “Hello, Luis, I’m Dr. Chung. You’re here for a check-up and a cleaning, is that right?” Typically, every six months or so it’s recommended that you go to a dentist and get a check-up. A “check-up” is another word for an exam, where a dentist or a doctor looks at your general health to see if there are any problems. A dentist will look at your teeth to make sure that there aren’t any problems inside your mouth. A “cleaning” is when a dental professional – it could be the doctor, but more typically it’s someone who works with the doctor, someone we would call a “hygienist” – comes and cleans your teeth, removes anything on your teeth that shouldn’t be there.

Luis says, “Yes, that’s right (yes, I’m here for a check-up and a cleaning).” Dr. Chung says, “Okay, let’s take a look (let’s look at you). Have you had your wisdom teeth taken out?” Your “wisdom teeth” are the four large teeth that are in the back of your mouth; they usually begin to appear in your late teens or early 20s. Many people need to have these teeth removed because there isn’t enough room in their mouth. Except me; I have a big mouth, so, at least that’s what my mother told me! Well, to remove these teeth means to have a special surgery, and it can sometimes be a little painful. So, this is what your wisdom teeth are. Not quite sure why they’re called your wisdom teeth; I suppose you don’t get them until you’re older and, we hope, a little wiser – a little smarter.

Luis says, “I haven’t,” meaning I have not had my wisdom teeth taken out. “To take out” means to remove. Dr. Chung says, “Hmm...You may need to do that soon.” Then she says, “You’ve had a root canal?” A “root (root) canal” is a



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

procedure, which can be painful, where a dentist takes out a damaged part of your tooth that is below the skin, so it's actually inside of your mouth, and the dentist will often have to make a hole in your teeth in order to repair the damage underneath your teeth. I've had a couple of root canals; they're not fun. I wouldn't do one just because it feels good; in fact, it doesn't feel very good at all! The "root" is the bottom of your teeth. That word, "root," is also used with a tree or a plant, and that refers to the part of the tree or the plant that is below the ground, that is in the dirt. So, your root for your teeth are underneath the skin. "Canal," here, just means a hole.

Luis says that he had a root canal about three years ago. Dr. Chung touches the tooth where the root canal was and asks, "Does that hurt?" and Luis says, "Ow!" which is how you express pain, at least in English. Dr. Chung says, "I guess I hit a nerve." The "nerves" of your body are the parts that carry messages to your brain, sending information about pain, about temperature, about touch. It's something that if you touch it and there's a problem with the nerve – if the nerve is damaged – it can be very painful.

Dr. Chung says, "The bad news is that you may need another root canal soon." Even though he had a root canal that was supposed to fix the problem the first time, it didn't, and now he has to have another root canal. Lucky Luis! Dr. Chung also says that she wants to look at Luis to see if he has any cavities. "Cavity" (cavity) is a small hole; in this case, a small hole in a tooth, and if you don't fix the hole – if don't fill in the hole (put something there), it could damage or hurt your teeth. In fact, Dr. Chung says that Luis has to come back to her office to get a filling. A "filling" is a small amount of metal that is put into this little hole – this cavity – to cover and protect the teeth so that they are not damaged further. He has a cavity in his left molar (molar). Your "molars" are your large teeth. They don't have a pointed top on them. They're usually – well, they're always in the back of your mouth. We use these for chewing our food. So, he has a cavity in one of his molars. The doctor then asks him, "Are you experiencing any sensitivity?" "Sensitivity," in this case, would mean some sort of pain when you touch something, even if you just touch it very lightly – you just barely touch it, you could have sensitivity and that would cause pain.

Luis says, "Yes, I am!" meaning I am experiencing this painful sensitivity. Dr. Chung says, "I'm not surprised. Your gums have receded and some of the root is showing. Don't you use dental floss?" Your "gums" in your teeth are the pink skin that covers the bottom of your teeth. When we say something has "receded," we mean that it has moved back or pulled away from something else. So, if your gums are in a poor condition, one thing that can happen is that the gums begin to pull away from the teeth, to go down, and that can cause



ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

problems. One of the problems is that some of the root of the tooth could be exposed, and that can cause pain. The root is the part, remember, of the tooth that is below the surface, that you can't normally see.

Dr. Chung asks Luis if he's using dental floss. "Dental floss" is a long piece of thin string that you usually hold between your two fingers, and you move it in between your teeth in order to clean your teeth. It's something you would do in addition to brushing your teeth, which, of course, is to take a small toothbrush and move it back and forth against the front and back of the teeth to clean them. Floss is something that goes in between the teeth.

Luis says he uses dental floss, though we're not quite sure. Dr. Chung then says, "I'll have the dental hygienist show you how to brush and floss better so you can prevent the buildup of plaque and tartar." Couple of different words there: First, the dental hygienist is the person who works with the dentist, who is not usually a doctor, whose job it is to clean your teeth and to check your teeth. The dental hygienist is going to show Luis how to brush and floss better so he can prevent the buildup of plaque and tartar. "Buildup" means accumulation, when you have a little bit of material and you keep adding, over a long period of time, a little more and a little more and a little more. That can happen on your teeth. It can happen with two things called "plaque" (plaque) and "tartar" (tartar). "Plaque" is a thin layer of food and bacteria that covers your teeth after you eat that you need to remove after you eat with a toothbrush. Otherwise, it can damage or hurt your teeth. "Tartar" is a hard yellow layer on your teeth. When you do not remove the plaque regularly, then you can get this yellow layer, and that's why some people have yellow teeth, because the plaque has built up so much that it has now become tartar. By the way, I'm not a dentist so I hope I got that explanation right!

Dr. Chung says, "Any questions for me before the hygienist starts on your cleaning?" and Luis says, "No, I'm just glad you didn't say I need dentures!" "Dentures" are basically false teeth, fake teeth, artificial teeth that you wear instead of your real teeth. So, Dr. Chung is not saying that Luis's teeth are so bad he needs dentures. She says, "Not yet," meaning if you don't change your ways it may be something you need in the future.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

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Luis: No, I'm just glad you didn't say I need dentures!

Dr. Chung: No, you don't. Not yet.

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by someone who's so smart, I think she has extra wisdom teeth, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.



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ESL Podcast 503 – Seeing a Dentist

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