



WHERE'S the Plaque?

JACQUES DOUECK, DDS

How is a person to know if he did a good job brushing and flossing, if plaque is invisible? Wouldn't it be great if you could actually *see* the bacteria on your teeth – so you know if you got rid of it?

In today's world of high-tech electronics, there are machines and devices that can do some amazing things. In our office we pride ourselves in being the dental technology leader, but, to be honest, some of the new devices we try eventually end up in our "museum" in the garage. In order to be on the cutting edge of technology, a dental office has to invest some money in R&D (research and development).

Our most recent investment is in the area of diagnostics – a device that allows us – and our patients – to clearly *see* the plaque stuck on their teeth. The results are magnificent. With this quick

diagnostic tool, both children and adults can see exactly where they must brush to properly clean their teeth. By actually getting a visual of the bacteria on the teeth, it becomes simple for patients to understand why their gums are bleeding or why they are developing decay under their fillings. Most importantly, they will be able to accurately target the cause.

This marvel of modern science is actually over 40 years old. Using a special vegetable dye that has an affinity for bacterial plaque, we can "stain" the bacteria and make these formerly concealed bacteria easy to spot and easy to remove.

We "paint" the teeth with a special purple liquid, and ask the patient whether he brushed before coming to the office. This gives us – and the patient – an excellent opportunity to see how well he brushes, because people usually brush their teeth especially thoroughly before

visiting the dentist. A special two-tone liquid allows us to distinguish between bacteria that surfaced within the last 24 hours (pink) and bacteria that had been sitting there for more than 24 hours (purple). At the end of the "experiment," we can give the patient (or the mother, if the patient is a child) a packet of four tablets, and instruct the patient to chew one tablet every week, before brushing. After chewing, he should spread the dye all over the teeth with his tongue and then rinse his mouth with water. The dye will stain the bacteria, like the liquid we use in the office. Then the teeth are brushed and examined a second time, until there is no plaque left on the teeth.

Sometimes a simple purple tablet can be more effective than a \$20,000 piece of fancy equipment. Take advantage of "low tech" tools to help keep your teeth for a lifetime.