



Fluoride Talking Points and Alternatives

Patients may have concerns about their oral health with the potential removal of fluoride from drinking water. As dental professionals, it's crucial to provide clear, reassuring information and viable alternatives to maintain dental health. By understanding and communicating the benefits of fluoride and its alternatives, dental professionals can help alleviate patient fears and ensure continued oral health despite changes in water fluoridation policies.

Benefits of Professionally Applied Fluoride Varnish

Prevention of Tooth Decay:

- By strengthening tooth enamel, fluoride varnish significantly reduces the risk of dental caries (tooth decay).
- According to ADA studies, it has been shown to reduce the prevalence of dental caries in baby teeth by 37% and in permanent teeth by 43%.
- Fluoride helps reduce the impact of frequent intake of sugary food and sugar-sweetened beverages.

Remineralization:

- Fluoride varnish helps in the remineralization of enamel, repairing early signs of tooth decay (white spot lesions)
- This process makes teeth more resistant to acid attacks from bacteria in the mouth
- Protects margins of crowns and fillings
- Protects areas void of enamel in the case of recession
- Helps offset the decreased flow of saliva that contributes to increased decay rates

Management of Tooth Sensitivity:

- Fluoride varnish can help manage tooth sensitivity by strengthening enamel and reducing exposure to irritants

Non-Invasive and Quick Application:

- The application of fluoride varnish is quick, simple, and non-invasive
- It can be applied in less than 5 minutes, making it convenient for both patients and dental professionals

Cost-Effective Preventative Measure:

- By preventing tooth decay, fluoride varnish can reduce the need for more expensive restorative treatments like fillings, crowns, and implants
- It is a cost-effective way to maintain oral health, especially for those at higher risk of cavities
- Many dental benefit plans cover the cost of fluoride applications.

Suitable for All Ages:

- Fluoride varnish is beneficial for both children and adults, particularly those at higher risk of tooth decay
- It is especially effective for children who may not be exposed to fluoride from other sources

Because of the important role fluoridation has played in reducing tooth decay, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention proclaimed community water fluoridation one of ten great public health achievements of the 20th century.

Addressing Concerns:

Health Risks: Assure patients that fluoride at recommended levels is safe. Excessive fluoride can cause issues like fluorosis, but this is rare and typically cosmetic. ¹

Effectiveness: Highlight the extensive research supporting fluoride's role in reducing cavities and improving oral health; share the ADA's Fluoride Resource. ²

Increasing Fluoride Treatments Sample Scripting

Identify the specific benefits of fluoride treatment tailored to each patient. For example, explain how fluoride can strengthen their teeth, reduce the risk of cavities, and help maintain a healthy smile. Highlight how these benefits are relevant to their dental health needs and lifestyle. Patients are more likely to agree to the treatment when they understand how it directly benefits them.

Benefits of fluoride include:

- Reducing sensitivity
- Strengthening enamel
- Reversing early decay
- Protecting crown margins
- Protection for areas of recession
- Prevents the growth of cavity-causing bacteria

Dialogue Pointers:

- Listen Actively – allow the patient time to verbalize their concerns
- Empathize – show empathy and validate their concerns
- Educate with facts and share resources
- Tailor to their needs - Explain key fluoride benefits that are specific to their situation
- Reassure safety with facts and share resources
- Offer alternatives

Example Dialogue:

"Mrs. Smith, you have several areas with recession that we have been monitoring. As you can see from these images (show Mrs. Smith the recession with an intra-oral camera image), you don't have any enamel on these surfaces. Without the hard outer shell enamel provides, you become very susceptible to cavities, even with ideal home care. Fluoride treatments, like those you may have received as a child, can help prevent these types of gum line cavities, which are hard to repair. The dental benefit plan your employer negotiated does not cover fluoride treatments. Our fee is \$58. You can think about it and let me know at the end of your appointment if you'd like me to apply it for you."

"Mrs. Smith, you have invested in several crowns over the years. The margins of these crowns, where the crown meets the root, can be susceptible to decay, even with ideal home care. Fluoride treatments, like those you may have received as a child, can help prevent this type of breakdown around crowns. The dental benefit plan your employer negotiated does not cover fluoride treatments. Our fee is \$58. Dr. Smith feels strongly that you get to make your own healthcare decisions, regardless as to limitations on a benefit plan, that's why I want to make sure you know that is still a viable option for you to prevent future breakdown."

"Mrs. Smith, the sensitivity you are experiencing can be reduced with a combination of in-office fluoride varnish treatments and at -home prescription fluoride toothpaste. Keep in mind that most over the counter toothpastes contain approximately 1,000 ppm fluoride. Prescription pastes contain 5,000pm and in-office treatments have 27,000ppm fluoride. Fluoride is critical to mineralize the areas that are sensitive. Fluoride treatments, like those you may have received as a child, are very beneficial not only to reduce the sensitivity but also to reduce the risk of decay. The dental benefit plan your employer negotiated does not cover fluoride treatments. Our fee is \$58. You can think about it and let me know at the end of your appointment if you'd like me to apply it for you"

Alternatives:

If they are still hesitant, discuss alternative treatments like Curodont or hydroxyapatite, which also help remineralize teeth. Let them know that you are committed to finding the best solution for their health.

Lower Dose Fluoride Treatments:

While most fluoride varnish products contain 5% sodium fluoride, (22,600ppm) there are lower fluoride options such as Clinpro Clear Fluoride which has 2.1% sodium fluoride.

Fluoride rinses, gels and foam generally contain 1.23% APF fluoride (12,300ppm)

Silver Diamine:

Silver diamine fluoride contains a high fluoride level of 5% (44,800); however, it is applied to beginning lesions only and is site-specific rather than applied to all teeth.

Curodont:

A synthetic peptide treatment that mimics natural processes that promotes tooth repair by allowing minerals such as fluoride, calcium, and phosphate in saliva to penetrate the enamel lesion. This is similar to peptides found in skin care creams to combat signs of aging. It is applied to early lesions and can be combined with traditional fluoride varnish and billed on the same date of service.

Xylitol:

Available in gums, candies, and toothpaste. Reduces harmful bacteria, promotes saliva production, and helps prevent cavities. Generally safe, but excessive consumption may cause some gastrointestinal discomfort.

¹ <https://www.ada.org/resources/community-initiatives/fluoride-in-water/ada-applauds-usphs-final-recommendation-on-optimal-fluoride-level-in-drinking-water>

² <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/fluoride>