

## News From the Office of:



**Dr. Tina Brenza**

Welcome to our very first issue of Dental Health News® - a newsletter especially produced to bring you practical tips and information on everyday dental health issues. Whether it's a guide to brushing and flossing effectively or options on whitening your teeth, we hope to bring you the information that you need to ensure good oral hygiene and health, and leave you smiling!

Let us know what you think of our new newsletter, and what topics you'd be interested in reading about in the future.

We are currently accepting new patients. We would be honored to provide care for any of your friends or family members whom you would refer to our practice. Your referral is the greatest compliment.

Sincerely,

*Tina Brenza*

Dr. Tina Brenza

## CALMING YOUR DENTAL FEAR FACTOR

**IF THE MERE THOUGHT OF VISITING A DENTIST CAUSES YOUR HEART TO POUND AND YOUR PALMS TO SWEAT, REST ASSURED THAT YOU'RE NOT ALONE!**



There are no hard statistics on it, but it's estimated that millions of North Americans are so fearful of going to the dentist that they simply don't go. And of course, the trouble with dental problems is that they don't go away if you ignore them.

We encourage you to share your anxieties with us. Getting your concerns out in the open will let us adapt any treatments to your needs. In addition to open communication, try these tips too:

- Set aside a stress-free time for your appointment – don't try to squeeze it in between other meetings you're rushing to get to.
- Avoid taking any stimulants – coffee or cola for instance – before your appointment.
- When preparing for a dental procedure, let us know if you'd prefer to sit up or lie down in the chair. This often makes a big difference in people's comfort levels.

- Before we start anything, let's also agree on a signal, such as raising your hand, if you need to take a break.

- Feel free to bring a blanket from home, especially if you'll be in the office for an extended procedure. It may sound funny, but you'd be surprised at how comforting it can be.

- Bring an iPod or some other personal music device with your favorite tunes, to distract you from the noise of the office.

- Use deep breathing exercises, or relaxation techniques like those taught in yoga.

Some patients steer clear of the dentist because they think we might chastise them for neglecting their mouths for so long. If you fear my reaction to the condition of your teeth and gums, please relax. My job isn't to judge you and your dental history, it's to bring your mouth back to health and to restore your smile. And believe me, your smile can be fixed, no matter how bad you think it is!

# OPEN WIDE FOR THE INSIDE STORY

Dental patients usually come in for checkups with one thing in mind: to make sure their teeth and gums are healthy, and to confirm that there are no problems with decay. What you might not realize is that dentists can often tell what other health problems or habits you may have too, just by looking in your mouth.



For example, you've probably noticed that heavy smokers tend to sport yellowish teeth and that they have a higher chance of developing oral cancer than non-smokers, but did you know that 41 percent of daily smokers over the age of 65 are toothless? The reason: smoking can raise your chances of developing calculus on your teeth, leading to deep pockets between the teeth and gums and eventually loss of the bone and tissue supporting your teeth.

Bleeding gums, dry mouth, fungal infections and cavities are often an indicator of a serious health issue like HIV, leukemia or diabetes. There is a proven link between diabetes and gum disease, as high blood sugar levels create a perfect source of food for bacteria in your mouth. The bacteria then attack the protective layer of enamel on your teeth until you develop cavities, in addition to periodontal or gum disease.

Patients with bulimia, an eating disorder involving repeated vomiting, can't hide their purging habits from their dentist, as the hydrochloric acid in vomit dissolves the teeth's protective outer coating, the enamel. Once the enamel wears away, the acid eats into the softer dentin underneath, quickly wearing down the teeth. While someone suffering from bulimia may not want to share that news with their dentist, it may be wise to ask for tips – everything from the need for increased brushing and flossing, to fluoride applications to help repair tooth damage, to restoring already-damaged teeth with resins or crowns – to save as much of the remaining natural teeth structure as possible.

When it comes to the connection between the mouth and the heart, there is some evidence to suggest that poor oral health – even more than high cholesterol and triglyceride levels – can increase your chances of developing heart disease. One theory is that if bacteria from infected gums enters the bloodstream, it can attach to blood vessels and increase clot formation. This decreases the blood flow to the heart, aggravating high blood pressure and increasing the chances of a heart attack.

Many times osteoporosis, a disease that causes bones to lose mass and become more fragile over time, is noticed first at the dental office because the patient finds themselves losing teeth. Remember that the jaw is a bone too, and will lose density just like any other bone in your body as osteoporosis progresses.

Keep in mind that many medications for various ailments contain sugar as a primary ingredient. Watch out especially for the sugar in chewable medications and many cough and cold-type syrups as a risk factor for oral problems.

There are many mouth-body connections that are important to know about, and we are happy to discuss them with you. Being aware of possible links between your oral health and general health make it more important than ever to maintain a regular schedule of dental visits and a vigilant habit of brushing and flossing, whether you're knowingly suffering from any of the diseases mentioned here or not.



# SAFEGUARD YOUR SMILE

Whether you're a recreational rink rat, a weekend warrior or a professional athlete, and regardless of whether you have a full set of pearly whites or only a few teeth in your mouth, anybody participating in a physical sport or activity is advised to protect their mouth with a full cage on their helmet, and an athletic mouthguard.

A properly fitted mouthguard is an important piece of athletic equipment: it can cushion a blow that might otherwise cause broken teeth, and injuries to the lips, tongue, face or jaw. Mouthguards are also believed to aid in reducing the severity and incidence of concussions.

The most effective mouthguard should be comfortable, resilient and tear-resistant, and not restrict your speech or breathing. There are now a variety of mouthguards available to protect the smiles of athletes in any sport:

**1. THE READY-MADE, STOCK MOUTHGUARD.** Although inexpensive and easily available at any sporting goods store, these "one-size-fits-all" mouthguards rarely fit anyone properly. They're bulky, hard to breathe in, and don't provide much protection.

**2. THE "BOIL AND BITE" MOUTHGUARD.** These are also available at retail stores. While still somewhat bulky, they provide a better fit than the stock mouthguards, as the wearer first softens them in hot water, then shapes them to their own mouth.

**3. THE CUSTOM-MADE MOUTHGUARD ISSUED BY DENTISTS.** These are individually customized to your mouth, and provide the best fit, comfort and protection.

It's important to take any removable appliances, such as an orthodontic retainer, removable bridge or dentures, out of your mouth before putting your mouthguard in place. And once it's in place, remember to wear your mouthguard during practices as well as games.



Talk to us about protecting your smile with a properly fitted mouthguard.



## THE "HOLE" TRUTH ABOUT ORAL PIERCING

Piercing one's lips or tongue can be a fashion statement, just like piercing the ears. However, there are a number of risks unique to oral piercing that one should be aware of before agreeing to the procedure.

First of all, the mouth contains millions of bacteria, so the risk of infection is higher with tongue piercing than with many other kinds. The fact that piercing the tongue is a painful process is obvious, but the bigger concerns are that piercing could also cause uncontrollable bleeding or nerve damage, and that the tongue could swell after piercing, possibly blocking the airway.

In addition, tongue jewelry gets in the way of talking and eating, and can damage the teeth. It's often tempting for the wearer to bite or play with mouth jewelry, leading to chipped or fractured teeth, and in some cases the need for fillings or even a root canal or tooth extraction. Researchers have also determined that the longer a piece of jewelry is in the mouth, the more likely it is that the wearer will suffer from gum recession, which can lead to loose teeth and eventual tooth loss.

If the risk of infection, pain and swelling, scar tissue, nerve damage, chipped or cracked teeth, injuries to the gums and damage to fillings isn't enough to make you think twice about your desire for an oral piercing, be aware that mouth jewelry can also lead to excessive drooling, not the most fashionable look around!

Make sure that anyone in your household considers the consequences of oral piercing carefully before making any spontaneous decisions. If the piercing has already taken place, please keep an eye out for any signs of infection and call us immediately if you notice any swelling, pain, fever, chills, shaking or a red-streaked appearance around the site of the piercing. Take the jewelry out immediately, and note that holes from oral piercings do close quickly.

# MEET THE TEAM MEMBERS

Dr. Brenza attended Loyola University for her undergraduate studies and graduated from Northwestern University Dental School in 1996. She then spent 2 years completing a residency and fellowship in Hospital Dentistry at the University of Iowa. This additional education provided her with the expertise to treat medically and physically compromised patients and the experience of performing many advanced dental procedures.

Originally from the Chicago area, she decided to come to Rockford after her fellowship because she really liked the community and all it had to offer. She exclusively treated the developmentally disabled until 2005, when she and her husband, Ryan Yelles, had their first child, Grant. In early 2006, she purchased the practice of Dr. John Lund. In late 2006, Dr. Brenza and her husband welcomed their second child, Evan, into their family.

Dr. Brenza greatly enjoys providing her patients with exceptional dental treatment while spending quality time with all of them. She has special interests in cosmetic dental procedures and dental implants. With her post-graduate education, she is credentialed to utilize various forms of sedation for patients with dental anxiety, treat young children and the elderly, and to provide dental treatment in a hospital with general anesthesia.

Dr. Brenza is dedicated to continuing education for herself and her team. Being continuous students ensures their dedication to excellence. She is truly honored to be entrusted with the maintenance of excellent oral health for all of her patients.

In her spare time, Dr. Brenza enjoys spending time with her family and numerous pets. She looks forward to traveling with her children as they grow so that she can share her love of history and nature with them. She is passionate about protecting the environment, from recycling to sustainable living, to cleaning up our community.

## 3 STEPS TO A SECURE SMILE

If you're missing one or more teeth and want to fill the gap with the most natural-looking, comfortable solution possible, you'll be interested in hearing about dental implants.

A dental implant involves the installation of an artificial tooth to a metal fixture in your jaw, placed where the missing tooth was. There are usually three basic treatment steps to this procedure:

1. Once we determine that your gums are healthy and that you have enough bone in your jaw to support the implant(s), a metal post or "anchor" will be surgically placed into your jawbone.
2. After the post has fused in place, a piece called an abutment will then be attached to the top of the post to hold the false tooth.
3. The final step is the attachment of your new tooth, which will be shaped, sized and custom-designed to blend in with the color and look of the surrounding teeth, to the artificial tooth root.

If you're looking for a permanent, natural-looking replacement for one or more teeth, please call us to find out more about how implants might work for you.



### Tina Brenza, D.D.S.

**419 N. Mulford Rd., #5  
Rockford, IL 61107**

**Phone:** 815-397-3820  
**Fax:** 815-397-9607  
**Web:** [www.doctorbrenza.com](http://www.doctorbrenza.com)  
**Email:** [theofficeofdrbrenza@comcast.net](mailto:theofficeofdrbrenza@comcast.net)

**Office Hours:**  
Mon. - Thurs.: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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