**Take Command of Your Health: Episode 3**

**Keeping Your Mouth Healthy**

**Jan. 28, 2021**

**Transcript**

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Anthony Vieira:

You’re listening to the Get to Know TRICARE Podcast: your resource for information to help you get the most out of your TRICARE benefit.

Hello. Thanks for tuning in to another episode of our Take Command of Your Health series. I’m Anthony Vieira from the TRICARE Publications Team. Today our focus will be on keeping your mouth healthy.

Did you know that your oral health is a window into the health of your body? The American Dental Association says your mouth can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or infection. Diseases that affect your entire body, like diabetes, may first become evident because of lesions in your mouth. Untreated oral health issues, like tooth decay can cause problems for your body as well. That’s why it’s important to take care of your gums and teeth—and TRICARE can help you do that.

So, with that in mind, let’s turn to our special guest on the program today. Joining us is Army Colonel Christensen Hsu. Col. Hsu has a total of 20 years of service in the military and is currently the chief of the TRICARE Dental Program Section at the Defense Health Agency.

Col. Hsu, it’s a pleasure to have you on the program. Thanks for spending some time with me today.

Col. Hsu:

Thank you for having me.

Anthony Vieira:

Of course. And in the spirit of our podcast series Take Command of Your Health, we really want listeners to know that dental health is incredibly important. It’s not something that should be put on the backburner. So, what are some things people should know about maintaining good oral health?

Col. Hsu:

Well, absolutely. The oral cavity that includes your gums, your teeth, are essential parts of your overall health. So, taking command of your health is aligned to what we’re trying to do in terms of a dental enterprise and improving the oral health and dental health of our population. And some of the things that we can do is practice good oral hygiene. That means brushing your teeth twice per day—morning and night—with a soft-bristled brush and fluoride toothpaste, cleaning between your teeth daily with a interdental cleaner, such as flossing, and replacing your toothbrush every three or four months or sooner if the bristles are worn.

Anthony Vieira:

How often should you see your dentist? I know that’s a big part, too.

Col. Hsu:

Well, it’s important to see the dentist, because that is part of the preventive dentistry that we encourage for all of our beneficiaries. At least every six months, if possible.

Anthony Vieira:

And what about diet? Is what you eat, what you put into your body—does that affect your teeth?

Col. Hsu:

Oh, yes. I’m glad you brought that up. Eating a balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich foods, such as leafy greens, almonds, leafy greens, eggs, and fish. And also, drinking fluoridated water. That’s important as well, especially for our children. And limiting the sugary snacks, especially candy, gummy bears, even raisins, believe it or not, has a lot of sugar. So, those sugary snacks should be limited.

Anthony Vieira:

And a lot of those sugary snacks are certainly tempting. So that’s good to know.

Col. Hsu:

Yes, they are.

Anthony Vieira:

And I think our listeners will be pleased to know—for those who are lactose intolerant—that there are many options for getting calcium. If you can’t have dairy, you can have nuts, meat, leafy green vegetables, like you mentioned, and fruit. So, that’s great.

Switching gears to the TRICARE Dental Program, because I know with TRICARE, the dental coverage you can receive depends on the type of beneficiary you are, right? If you’re an active duty family member. If you’re an active duty service member or retiree.

Col. Hsu:

Yes.

Anthony Vieira:

So, talk to me about the TDP.

Col. Hsu:

Well, TDP, also known as the TRICARE Dental Program, is a voluntary dental plan and it’s administered by United Concordia. The eligible enrollees include active duty family members, family members of National Guard and Reserve, and National Guard or Reserve members who aren’t on active duty. The program serves the CONUS and OCONUS region. It offers single and family plans, and you can see any licensed dentist.

But seeing a network dentist that participates in TDP will actually help reduce the cost-shares, or also known as your out-of-pocket expenses. But you must enroll for a minimum of 12 months and the sponsor must have 12 months remaining on their service commitment.

Anthony Vieira:

And just a quick program note. You can find more information about this at TRICARE.mil/tdp or you can go directly to the TDP website at uccitdp.com.

So, Col. Hsu, in one of the recent episodes of the podcast, we talked about preventive health services, like cancer screenings and things like that. What about on the dental side? What are some dental preventive services?

Col Hsu:

Sure, absolutely. Well, the TRICARE Dental Program—TDP—covers preventive dental care. First of all, your exam, your annual exam, or if you can go in every six months, that is key to prevention. It also includes a lot of other procedures such as your dental cleanings, fluoride treatment, and space maintenance for our children. And you know, the TRICARE Dental Program, or TDP, it covers two dental cleanings in a consecutive 12-month period.

And a third cleaning may be covered if you’re pregnant or have a chronic medical condition. You can find more information about that in the TDP Wellness Program.

It also covers other services, including diagnostics, braces, and orthodontics as well. And like you mentioned, you can find more information on uccitdp.com.

Anthony Vieira:

So, in order to get into the dental chair, you have to find the right dentist. What are some of the things enrollees need to know about finding the right dentist?

Col Hsu:

Well, our enrollees can visit any dentist of their choice. Our network dentists, as I mentioned before—we have TRICARE OCONUS Preferred Dentists and network dentists in CONUS that can help save money, because they are participating in the TRICARE Dental Program. You won’t have to pay more than your regular costs when you receive a covered service from the network dentist.

Now, non-network dentists haven’t signed a contract with United Concordia. You can see a non-network dentist, but you may pay more out of pocket and need to file a claim for reimbursement. You may also have to pay for services before you get care with a non-network or non-TODP.

To find the network or OCONUS Preferred Dentist near you, use the Find a Dentist tool at www.uccitdp.com. I’ve personally gone on there several times. It’s very easy to use and I highly recommend it.

Anthony Vieira:

Oh, yeah. It certainly comes in handy. And it’s something that you can do from your mobile device when you’re at home or on the go.

Col Hsu:

Absolutely.

Anthony Vieira:

Switching gears a little bit. A very important rule for getting care with the TDP is for enrollees to understand the maximum they have. A maximum is the most the TDP will pay for your care within a certain amount of time. The TDP has three maximums, right?

Col Hsu:

Yes, you’re correct. We have the yearly maximum benefit, which is the most that TDP will pay for your dental care per plan year. The TDP plan year is a 12-month period and it runs from May 1 to April 30. The lifetime maximum benefit for orthodontic treatment is also another maximum. It’s the most the TDP will pay for orthodontic care during your lifetime.

And thirdly, the accidental yearly maximum benefit. It’s the most the TDP will pay for any dental care you get because of an accident per plan year. And also, if you need a major dental procedure, like oral surgery, just ask your dentist to submit a pre-determination to United Concordia. The *TRICARE Dental Program Handbook* provides an overview of these three maximums and other costs.

Anthony Vieira:

You can find those educational materials on the TRICARE Publications page at TRICARE.mil/publications.

I know a lot of our listeners out there are parents. I’m one of them. I have a toddler at home who’s learning how to brush her teeth. I wondered—are there some things that parents should keep in mind when caring for their children’s teeth?

Col Hsu:

Yes, and that’s a very good question. Every year in February, the American Dental Association— we recognize February as National Children’s Dental Health Month.

And although the campaign is only in February, it really should be a campaign every month. And parents specifically should be reminded about the importance of their children’s dental health at a very young age.

And the ADA recommendations are to at least have the children brush twice a day—morning and night—and to use the appropriate size child-sized toothbrush and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Not too much, just a little. And then for children, ages three to six, it’s really important to supervise their brushing. They’re new to it, and they’re not exactly very good in terms of brushing their teeth in the very back. You also have to remind them not to swallow it.

Anthony Vieira:

Oh, yeah.

Col Hsu:

Clean their teeth daily. Don’t let them get away with just skipping a day, it becomes a habit and then it just becomes second nature. Make sure your kids eat healthy foods and drink water with fluoride. And what’s really important is to avoid sharing utensils with your child. This prevents the transfer of cavity causing germs found in saliva. Make regular visits to your child’s dentist every six months or twice a year.

And, you know, don’t forget to make it fun. Brush your teeth together with your children. Let them pick out a toothbrush at the store. Again, make it fun, and it’ll become second nature and natural for them to brush their teeth twice a day.

Anthony Vieira:

That sounds great. And one of the things I do with my daughter to make it fun. We sing this song, “Brush, brush, brush. Brush your teeth.”

Col. Hsu, I think the big takeaway from our discussion today is do not put dental care on the back burner. It’s important to make sure you take care of your teeth.

Col Hsu:

Absolutely. And I couldn’t stress that enough. Preventive dentistry will be key in terms of having a very healthy lifestyle and maintaining overall health. Thank you very much, Anthony. I really appreciate being on this podcast.

Anthony Vieira:

Absolutely. Col Hsu, it’s been a pleasure. Thanks so much for joining. And that’s it for today’s episode on keeping your mouth healthy. For more on covered dental services and enrollment, be sure to check out the *TRICARE Dental Program Handbook* at TRICARE.mil/publications. Or, go directly to the TDP website at uccitdp.com.

For the Get to Know TRICARE Podcast, I’m Anthony Vieira.

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Thanks for listening. We’ll be back with another edition of the Get to Know TRICARE Podcast soon. For the latest TRICARE news, be sure to visit our website at TRICARE.mil. And don’t forget to contact your TRICARE contractor or your local military hospital or clinic if you have questions or need assistance.

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