

Observations vs. Problems. One of the key aspects of holistic dentistry is to differentiate between benign dental variations (observations) and genuine concerns (problems), armed with insights on when to pursue intervention and when a watchful, yet proactive, approach is best. In other words, it requires critical thinking and not just quick decisions.



The typical dental approach is that if it is not ideal, it probably needs treatment. And often times this recommended treatment is aggressive like a crown or multiple crowns, orthodontics, surgeries, wisdom tooth removal, multiple fillings in teenagers etc. My observation through the years has been that the more aggressive the treatment, the more the chance of complications requiring even more aggressive and invasive treatments later on.

In holistic dentistry, the art of observation is paramount. Recognizing variations, understanding their significance, and integrating them into a holistic care approach ensures that patients receive care that's attuned not just to clinical standards but also to their individual needs, aspirations, and well-being in the least invasive, most conservative way.

Every dental examination involves an array of observations, from the minor to the significant. Yet, not every variation from the 'ideal' necessarily equates to a genuine dental concern. Discerning between benign observations and true problems is a vital skill for a dentist, ensuring that care is both effective and tailored to real needs.

Other examples of observations may be a stain in a groove or pit, discoloration between a filling and the tooth, crowding and/or misalignment of teeth, deep bites, crossbites, underbites, gum recession, root surface erosion, a jaw joint that clicks, a small/incipient cavity see on an xray, wear and tear on teeth from clenching/grinding, cracks and craze lines in enamel, small chips or fractures, wisdom teeth. Observations do indeed need action, that is, they need to be proactively monitored with baseline xrays, photographs and ongoing review of patient history. The action may indeed be the 3 P's – preserve, protect, prevent – with the many holistic products, supplements and techniques available to us.



This patient moved away years ago and had the cusp fracture off. She was told by 2 dentists that she needed a crown immediately or it would progress to serious problems. She did nothing for years - had no sensitivity, no pathology on the xray, the filling that was there had some rough edges but was fine, she chewed normally, was able to keep the tooth clean and mineralized – all the parameters of an “observation”. She finally decided that she just wanted it restored. Interestingly enough many years prior, the same thing happened to the tooth in front of it and was restored with a conservative direct bonded composite onlay restoration which looked as good as the day it was done. The fractured tooth was restored the same way

–not a crown.

The important question – is the observation affecting comfort (mental and physical), function, esthetics, and/or health – not just oral health but overall health? If it ***IS***, then it may indeed be a problem that requires intervention. If it is ***NOT***, then ongoing proactive monitoring is indicated.