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Remaining Caries-Free, a Personal Concern: Salutogenic Experiences in Adults

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Objectives Studies regarding the absence of caries have only appeared in recent years and the salutogenic perspective on this is therefore an almost unexplored area. A deeper understanding of the health factors behind caries freedom could lead to better help and treatment for affected individuals as well as better support for those without caries to remain caries-free.

This qualitative study aimed to explore middle-aged individuals' experiences of positively influencing factors to remain caries-free.

Methods The inclusion criteria were age over 40 years and DFT=0. A strategic selection was made from the dental records from the Public Dental Health in the region of Västra Götaland, Sweden, to include informants with different backgrounds in terms of gender, age, socioeconomics, and living in urban areas or in the countryside. Invitations and information were sent after which written consents were obtained. A total of 15 individuals were included and interviewed via online meetings. The audio-recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim, and the textual data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach. The study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (registration number 2020-04819).

Results To remain caries-free were by the informants described as a personal concern. The study not only showed the importance of continuity, information and good communication in dental care, but also that the transmission of information, encouragement and good dietary and oral hygiene habits with additional fluoride intake, from family and school were important. Such early engagement and care foster good routines, firmly rooted in a personal concern to oral health and a consequentialist approach that emphasizes the long-term benefits of preventive care.

Conclusions Being thorough and responsible seem to be personal qualities that promote freedom of caries. Experiences of gratitude and pride in managing to stay caries-free were also expressed.