

# Making the switch to holistic dentistry

Dentist **Suzanne Roelofs** explains how studying naturopathic medicine to heal her own health problems led her to transform her practice.

I got into dentistry when I was 18 and had just finished high school studying mostly maths, physics, biology, chemistry, science etc. I knew I wanted to work with my hands and also with people. I stumbled across dentistry and applied. I finished my masters in The Netherlands at 23 and did a postgraduate in Australia. And then on to studying dento-facial aesthetics, in New York. I've worked in various practices in different countries.

With some turmoil in my life I decided to do more studying in 2008. I needed something more, a new



challenge, something that everyday dentistry didn't give me. I wouldn't quite say I was bored with dentistry, I just wanted to do more for my clients than just repair their teeth. I thought it was knowledge I was after, and I was one out of 50 that got admitted to do a masters in periodontology (treating gum disease). I was there for 2 weeks and hated it. It just wasn't me.

Recurrent gum disease was treated with surgery to reduce pockets, but patients were still smoking and stressed out. I quit.

I sat myself down and asked myself what did I really want to do. My IBS had been particularly bad that year and I lost lots of weight, suffering terrible backache. I had been diagnosed with IBS when I was about 20. But no-one ever helped me solve the problem. You know you don't feel right but the doctors cannot find anything. They

gave me the diagnosis and "you have to learn to live with it". Between then and 2008 I had done plenty of reading and self-study to find the foods to eat to improve my digestion, but it never really did. Physiotherapy didn't help me much and I was getting frustrated. I tried so many things and started to lose faith in my doctors. There and then I decided to learn about nutrition, if I wasn't going to be able to implement it in dentistry in the long run, at least I would be able to help myself, once and for all.

## Allergens

And I did, and helped my friends and family – everyone around me was getting healthier because of my study in nutrition. I learned how to help heal from the inside out. I had allergy testing done in 2010 and discovered lots of allergens in my diet, mainly

grains. At that time my dad got a diagnosis with bowel cancer and it turned out his mum used to suffer with this as well. It made me think. I most likely have a hereditary coeliac problem, not just IBS, and if I didn't sort this out now, I would suffer the consequences later. I cut out all gluten and felt fabulous, and as a bonus the backache disappeared! And my doctor still couldn't diagnose me as a coeliac.

Doing the course in nutrition was a real eye-opener. For years I had been educated to look for evidence-based information only, but now case studies became as valuable as randomised controlled trials. Now I was taught that everyone is different. Things started to make sense. I had chosen the College of Naturopathic Medicine because it is in central London. Also I was drawn to this particular course because of its naturopathic teaching. I was taught at

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CNM in such a way that I changed my way of thinking in dentistry as well.

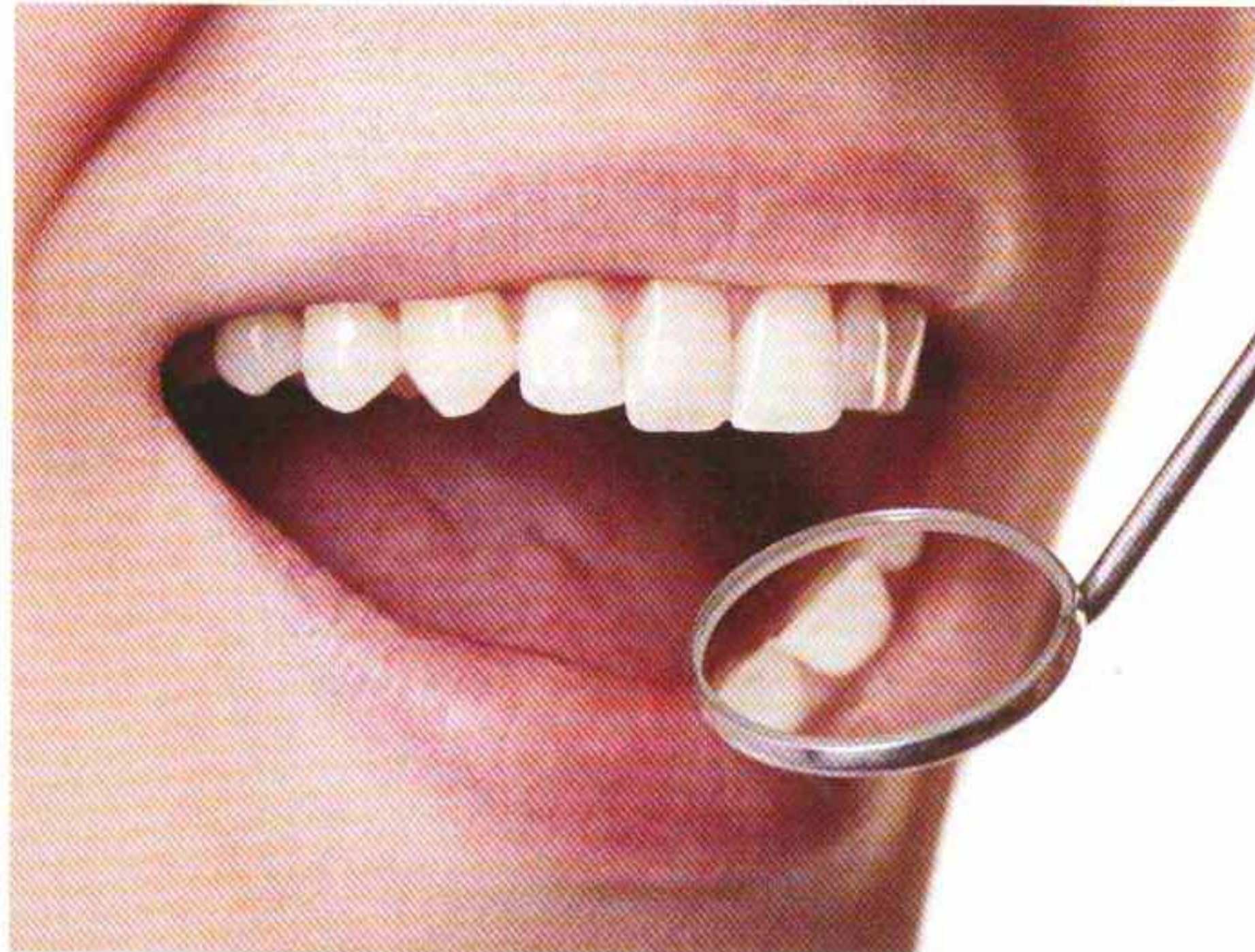
I realized that I needed to change the dentist in me to one that is holistic, and do more for my clients as an individual. I wanted to use natural means to help with dental conditions and also target underlying causes to treat dental diseases.

Implementing good foods, nutrition, stress management etc to improve patients' general and oral health seemed logical.

### Making the switch

I graduated in nutritional therapy earlier this year and knew I had to use my knowledge to assist my dental clients to help themselves. I feel a strong responsibility towards my clients to help them more (not just with a filling), as healthy gums and teeth are essential to overall wellbeing. We need our mouth to chew and digest our food. Food, in the end, becomes us. We believe nice teeth are a real beauty asset and make a person feel good about themselves. A lot of people are not aware of the dangers of gum disease, mercury fillings, fluoride, root canals, tooth loss, mouthwashes, etc. I used to be one of those people! But I made the switch and implemented holistic dentistry in my daily work.

I started talking to my clients about nutrition and supplements. This is where I saw nutrition working its effects on them, too. Clients with lingering gum disease, whom I had been trying to treat for years (and admittedly never really seeing full recovery) now included beneficial foods in their diets – and I saw vast improvements in their gum health. Teeth are an integral part of health. Food intake is extremely important for the development and maintenance of a healthy mouth and body. Nutrition deficiencies can cause all kinds of oral diseases. For example, vitamin B deficiency can lead to red swollen lips, vertical fissures and a burning smooth red tongue. The tongue can give us so much information about the state of the body. Another example is scurvy,



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which is on the way back because people eat the wrong foods. Good nutrition and a healthy gastrointestinal tract are the seed to life. It all starts in the mouth! Many diseases have oral manifestations. Gum disease, diabetes and heart disease are very much related.

I see so many clients with deficient diets who develop all kinds of problems in the mouth, such as enamel erosion, gum disease, decay. I will advise them about a healthy diet, with plenty of vegetables, low sugar etc, which will work wonders for their general health too.

Healthy teeth and gums can be established naturally, and now I am able to guide clients in the right direction with natural means, so they can look after themselves better.

### No amalgam

I implemented holistic dentistry further in practice. I switched to safe amalgam filling removal and detoxification, metal- and mercury-

natural techniques. Dental products will be chosen to be as natural as possible and advice about oral health and will be given. Amalgam fillings are removed safely with special equipment, and a detox protocol is made for the individual.

When I tried to implement all of this in my (then) usual practice I did have some clients that thought it was all rubbish, or asked for amalgam fillings. But in general I found clients very interested in their own health, and information on nutrition and dental health has been received well.

I think it is essential to be in a practice where clients can expect this sort of treatment, so the client base is not expecting just “drilling and filling”; also to get better compliance.

The great thing about dentistry is that people usually have regular check-ups. It is not like going to the doctor just when there is something wrong. I believe dentists have a major responsibility to educate people about their health – and especially their food intake. We see so much by looking in the mouth, it is a window to see the state of someone's health.

I've continued to grow and making the switch to holistic dentistry also has made me a happier dentist, as I know I can really help a person, naturally. **LZ**



### About the author

**Suzanne Roelofs, MSc (Netherlands) graduated as a dentist in the Netherlands**

**in 2002, and did a postgraduate certificate in Clinical Dentistry in Australia. Suzanne studied nutritional therapy at CNM while practising as a dentist in London. She will be taking bookings at the Hale Clinic from September 2011: [www.haleclinic.com](http://www.haleclinic.com), 020 7631 0156**  
\* Suzanne will be speaking on 'Healthy Teeth and Gums Naturally' on 11th September at an Open Weekend at The College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM) in London. For further details see [www.naturopathy-uk.com/openweekend](http://www.naturopathy-uk.com/openweekend). The College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM): [www.naturopathy-uk.com](http://www.naturopathy-uk.com), 01342 410505.