

Top Dentist 2003

Sheila Naik didn't see a dentist until she was 21. She grew up in the African nation of Zambia, where her Indian grandfather had immigrated at the turn of the century. She simply brushed twice a day and, after an uncle introduced the stuff, flossed regularly. No cavities, ever.



Naik became a dentist not too long after she had her first appointment with one. She had planned to become a physician when she and her identical twin sister, Anita, came to the United States at 18 to attend college in Oklahoma. It was Anita who majored in pre-dentistry, and her sister soon followed suit. After graduation, they parted ways. Anita now practices in a Dallas suburb, but Naik answered an ad in the Journal of American Dentistry Association and ended up in Glendale.

"This reminded me of Africa," says Naik, 34 "Arizona is as close as it gets to where I grew up. And trust me, snow is not my forte. It's the best thing I did, I love it here."

After eight years with Dental Net Group, she's in the throes of launching her solo private practice. Her specialty is family dentistry, which ranges from check-ups to extractions to root canals. "I get to see the whole family," she says. "Being in general dentistry, I've seen children since they were 5. Now they're 13."

Some have special needs, like Down syndrome or cerebral palsy. She puts kids at ease by playing show-and-tell with the dental tools before she uses them, assigning them kid-friendly terms like "tickle brush," and giving them prizes.

She's also good at putting adult fraidy cats and dentaphobes at ease. "They say I don't make them feel bad about the fact that they haven't been to a dentist for a while, or the fact that they're scared," says Naik, who frequently punctuates her sentences with a bubbly laugh. "Dentistry is rewarding because you take care of people who are in pain, or who are afraid, and you turn them around."

Education: Attended Southwestern Oklahoma State University as an undergrad, earned her DDS at the University of Oklahoma College of Dentistry in 1994, and took an additional year of advanced education in general dentistry there.

Family: Husband, Sandeep Nayee, works in the oil industry. They have a 2-year old son and a newborn daughter.

Other languages: Gujarati, Hindi, Nyanja (an African language), plus a little French and Spanish.
Her smile: Two root canals and two crowns, the result of Cracked Tooth Syndrome, caused by clenching her teeth when dental school stressed her out.

Her regime: Brushes at least twice and fosses at least once daily.

Favorite toothbrush: Electric. "With regular toothbrushes, especially men, they're very heavy-handed, they brush too hard. And then they end up getting receding gums."

Best advice: Get kids started early on dental care so they grow up knowing it's important. And put the kibosh on the Cokes. "I am constantly lecturing people about not drinking soda. All it is, is acid and sugar. And Kool-Aid! Moms seem to think Kool-Aid is fine for the babies. It's all sugar."

Biggest challenge! Patient compliance. "Flossing! It's a simple thing."

Her waiting room: Her solo practice will have an Indian-African motif, including tapestries of animals, palm trees, earth tones, and a fountain making soothing water sounds.

- *Melissa Morrison, Phoenix Magazine 2003*