1-1-1900

Good Dental Health Can Be Yours

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
GOOD DENTAL HEALTH CAN BE YOURS

Published cooperatively by
Indiana State Board of Health, Indianapolis,
and Purdue University Agricultural Extension
Service, Lafayette, Indiana
THE DENTAL PROBLEM

Teeth are unlike most other tissues of the body, in that, once they become diseased, they will not repair or heal themselves. The only way the proper function of teeth may be restored is by trained dental personnel.

Information gathered during World War II among the armed forces and since that time in various surveys throughout the United States, indicates that almost 100% of the population are affected by dental disease.

Let us look at the problem of dental decay alone. The President’s Commission on the Health Needs of the Nation reported that, unless adequate preventive and control measures are applied, the children of today will lose half their teeth by the time they are 40 years old. We know that in Indiana, on an average, children age 6 have one permanent tooth affected by decay. This rises steadily at the rate of about one permanent tooth per year, so that by the time children are 16, they will have about eight permanent teeth affected. We also know, in Indiana, that from 50% to 80% of these children have not had adequate dental care.

Decay prevalence in children is only one phase of the entire dental problem. Diseases of the soft tissues and supporting structures of the teeth are prevalent in a large percentage of the population. Dental disease of this nature accounts for the major cause of tooth loss in adults. There are still other dental defects occurring in the population. Two examples are malocclusion (i.e., incorrect alignment of teeth and jaws) and cleft-lip or palate (i.e., incomplete development).

Dental defects are occurring many times faster than they are being corrected. Present dental personnel cannot keep up with the rate of increase, let alone correct the vast amount of defects that have accumulated through the years. Although many of the dental diseases that have been cited must receive the attention of trained dental personnel, there are many preventive methods the individual may use to keep dental defects from becoming such a large problem.
IN BRIEF
WHAT CAN BE DONE

1. Early and Regular Care
   An early visit to the dentist will inform the individual if dental care is needed. Early and regular visits assure discovery of small defects that may be corrected, thus preventing the loss of a tooth. Then, too, regular visits require less time and the overall cost is less.

2. Good Nutrition and Less Sweets
   By including adequate amounts of proteins, minerals, fats and other nutritive elements in the daily diet, the body is provided with materials for developing healthy teeth and jaws. These elements are especially important to expectant mothers and growing boys and girls. Much tooth decay can be avoided by the restriction of sugars and between meal snacks in the diet.

3. Toothbrushing
   Proper toothbrushing is most effective immediately after eating, as it will remove many of the food particles which may lead to tooth decay. If not convenient to brush the teeth after eating, rinse the mouth thoroughly with water.

4. Fluorides
   Studies have revealed that one of nature’s defenses against tooth decay is fluorides. Two methods are used: adjusting the fluoride content of community water supplies to an accepted level, or having trained dental personnel apply a solution of fluoride to children’s teeth. Children who drink water containing 1-part-per-million of fluorides or who receive topical applications of a fluoride solution after the teeth have erupted, do not have as much tooth decay.

THESE ARE THE FACTS

1. Early And Regular Care
   The fact that dental disease affects almost 100% of our population has already been mentioned. A logical approach toward reducing this number is to have early and regular visits to the dentist, by adults as well as children.

   Favorable attitudes of parents toward dental visits are very important in getting a child’s cooperation. The child’s first visit to the dentist should be one in which he becomes acquainted with the office and equipment. If at all possible, it should not be an appointment for dental work.
In the early stages of dental decay, when repair is most effective, parents and children cannot detect these conditions. It takes trained dental personnel and x-ray films to find small cavities. Regular visits also can detect signs of other diseases and irregularities of growth which may be corrected. This will mean much when one thinks of the discomfort and the cost of correcting accumulated dental defects, and possibly, one's general health. Regular visits assure one against the premature loss of teeth, to say nothing of having the pleasures of a healthy mouth.

Children should make their first visit to the dentist when all 20 primary teeth have erupted, usually between 2 and 3 years of age. Fifty per cent of all 2-year-old children have tooth decay. It is impractical to say how often one should visit the dentist, since individuals differ in regard to mouth hygiene and susceptibility to tooth decay. However, the general rule is—once each 6 months, or as often as the dentist recommends.

2. Good Nutrition and Less Sweets

We hear and read about the basic 7 food groups: milk and milk products, bread and cereals, meat and eggs, butter, green and yellow vegetables, citrus fruit, and potatoes, and other vegetables and fruits. These foods should be included in our everyday diet for general good health and also for good dental health.

Teeth begin to form before children are born; therefore, these foods should be included in every expectant mother's diet. The growth and development of permanent teeth continue until a child is 16 or 18 years old.

It has been proven, beyond any doubt, that sugar is converted into an acid by the bacteria that live in the mouth. Under normal conditions, (i.e., during mealtime) the saliva successfully neutralizes the acids that are formed in the mouth; however, when people nibble on candies and sweets
between meals, it is impossible for the saliva to cope with all of this acid. The continued presence of this acid in the mouth can cause decay, and of course, an ultimate loss of teeth.

Our teeth are only as good as the tissues that surround them. Diseases of these supportive tissues account for the greatest loss of teeth during middle age. Our diets influence the degree of maintenance of these structures. Diets deficient in vitamins cause the gums to swell and bleed. Over a long period of time, the supporting bone may be destroyed so that the teeth loosen and must be removed. The teeth and gums must be kept free of debris so the blood can supply supporting structures with needed nutritive materials.

Even the physical characteristics of food are important. We need to include in our diet, fresh fruits and vegetables to help keep the mouth clean and provide exercise for the teeth and muscles. Stimulating the blood supply to the muscle and gums reduces the possibility of deterioration of the supportive tissues.

3. Toothbrushing

It is true that no method of toothbrushing alone has been devised that will assure complete cleaning of all surfaces of the teeth. However, correct toothbrushing is a great help in keeping our teeth clean. When we keep our teeth as clean as possible, we are preventing a great number of cavities and diseases of the gums.

The fact that we brush our teeth the first thing in the morning, and at night before going to bed, may give our mouth a refreshed feeling and good taste, but it does little, if any, good toward the prevention of decay. The teeth must be brushed immediately after we eat. When this is not possible, it is a great help to rinse the mouth with water.

Another very important point is how we brush our teeth. To haphazardly work up foam in the mouth does not assure us of proper cleaning. There is a correct way of brushing the teeth as there is a correct way of sweeping a floor with cracks in it. Our teeth have crevices in them and it is most important that we get the crevices clean.

The rules are simple:

1. **Brush the chewing surfaces with a scrubbing motion.**

2. **Brush the upper teeth down.**

3. **Brush the lower teeth up.**

4. **Brush the surfaces next to the tongue as well as those next to the cheek.**

5. **Start the brushing by placing the brush on the gums and sweep down to stimu-
late circulation in this area.

The brush should be one that has firm, straight and flat bristles. It should be small enough to permit access to all surfaces of the teeth. The brush should be dry when used; therefore, it is a good idea to have two brushes that can be used alternately. The correct use of dental floss assists in cleaning the spaces between the teeth.

Toothpaste or powder can aid in cleaning the teeth. However, some of the extravagant claims made by the manufacturers have not been proven satisfactorily. An inexpensive cleansing agent can be made by mixing (1/2) table salt and (1/3) baking soda. Either of these substances may be used alone.

4. Fluorides

Many scientific research studies have been made on the topical application of fluorides. More recent clinical studies indicate that a stannous fluoride solution is more effective than a solution of sodium fluoride; therefore, the State Board of Health recommends the use of stannous fluoride (i.e., painting a solution of stannous fluoride on the teeth). It is recommended that a series of 4 applications be made, at ages 3, 7, 10 and 13. Topical application of fluoride will not halt decay...
already started, but it will prevent approximately 50 to 60% of new decay. The American Dental Association recommends that in areas where drinking water is deficient in fluorides, topical fluoride applications should be used routinely by dentists or by dental hygienists working under the supervision of dentists.

Scientific research has found that in some areas, fluoride occurs naturally in the drinking water; and in these areas, there is 60% to 65% less tooth decay. It has been shown that children drinking fluoridated water from birth have received these benefits. After years of study, a method is available to adjust the fluoride content of public water supplies to an optimum level. All major health organizations approve and support the fluoridation of community water supplies as a safe and effective way to reduce tooth decay. Among these groups are: The American Dental Association, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, American Association of Public Health Dentists, U.S. Public Health Service, Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, State and Territorial Dental Directors and National Research Council.

Remember for better dental health—

1. Early and regular visits to the dentist.
2. Eat well balanced meals and less sweets.
3. Brush the teeth properly after eating.
4. Topical fluorides and fluoridated water reduce decay in children.

Reference Materials

1. Pamphlets
   a. “Dental Health Facts for Teachers”
      Sample copies—Indiana State Board of Health
   b. “Diet and Dental Health”
      Sample copies—Indiana State Board of Health
   c. “The Care of Children’s Teeth – Questions and Answers”

Sample copies—Indiana State Board of Health

2. Demonstrations
   a. Model teeth and brush
      Short term loan—Indiana State Board of Health
   b. Display of basic seven foods and group of sweets
      Local Health Department or Home Demonstration Agent

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3. Films
   a. “It’s Your Health”
      Indiana State Board of Health
   b. “Swab Your Choppers”
      Indiana State Board of Health
   c. “Teeth Are to Keep”
      Indiana State Board of Health
   d. “Teeth, Their Structure and Care”
      Indiana State Board of Health
   e. “Gateway to Health”
      Indiana State Board of Health

4. Charts
   a. Toothbrushing
      Indiana State Board of Health

If further information is desired—

(1) See local Public Health Nurse.

(2) Write:
    Division of Dental Health
    Indiana State Board of Health
    1330 West Michigan Street
    Indianapolis 7, Indiana