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Let’s Improve Our Dental Health Practices

EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATING
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LET'S IMPROVE OUR DENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

I. What can we do to improve our dental health?

Everyone can do something about better dental health—either as an individual or as a member of a Home Extension Unit or any organized group. You can help yourself and others by recognizing that dental health appears to affect general health throughout life, consequently the teeth should be protected. One of the forms of protection is the early establishment of desirable habits for good dental care.

II. What are some of the desirable habits for good dental care?

A. Sometime between the ages of 2 and 3 years:
   1. Introduce the child to the practice of tooth brushing. This can best be done by having the child go through the motions of brushing his own teeth, although an adult may need to assist him. In this way, the habit of tooth brushing will be established.

   2. Help him to understand that the purposes of brushing the teeth are to:
      a. Remove food particles from between the teeth or from the biting surfaces.
      b. Stimulate circulation of the blood to the gums.
      c. Help prevent deposits of tartar.
      d. Promote clean healthy teeth.

   3. Teach him a few simple rules to follow in brushing his teeth: Since the greatest damage to the teeth apparently occurs within the first fifteen minutes after eating, they should be brushed promptly.
      a. Brush the teeth after eating.
      b. Brush each area at least four times.
      c. Brush lower teeth up.
      d. Brush upper teeth down.
      e. Brush chewing surfaces with a scrubbing stroke.
      f. Brush the surfaces next to the tongue as well as those next to the cheek.
      g. Brush the teeth of each jaw separately in a definite order.
      h. Should your tooth brush not be available, thoroughly rinse your mouth with water four or five times.

   A good tooth brush will have:
   a. A flat brushing surface.
   b. Dry, firm natural bristles.
   c. Two or three rows of bristles, four or six tufts of bristles in each row, depending on whether the tooth brush is for a child or adult.

   A new tooth brush is recommended every four months. There can be a choice of tooth paste or tooth powder—usually, children can use tooth paste more easily. A satisfactory substitute for commercial tooth paste or powder is baking soda or a powder made by mixing one part of fine table salt with three parts of baking soda.
B. At about this same age—between 2 and 3 years, the child should make his first visit to the dentist. Although little or not dental treatment usually is necessary at this age, the visit is important because the child becomes acquainted with the dentist and the dental tools he may use. This will do much to eliminate the feeling of fear that often has led both young and old to postpone needed dental service. With repetition of visits to the dentist at regular intervals, the child will learn that this is an important part of maintaining dental health.

These regular visits also will give the dentist an opportunity to employ preventive measures in the control of dental disease. Your dentist will recommend how often you should return.

C. One of these measures is called dental prophylaxis or cleaning of the teeth. It consists of the removal of all foreign material from the teeth and the smoothing and polishing of tooth surfaces.

Three purposes are served:
1. Preventing infection or damage to the gums which may result from irritation caused by accumulated deposits.
2. Detecting beginning decay more easily after all deposits have been removed from the teeth.
3. Removing unsightly stains from the teeth.

D. Another preventive measure used is the application of sodium fluoride to the surfaces of the teeth of children (Topical application). The dentist cleans the teeth, dries them thoroughly and then applies a 2 per cent solution of sodium fluoride, allowing it to dry on the teeth. The treatment consists of four separate applications given at time intervals of from two to seven days. It is recommended that treatments be given at the approximate ages of 3, 7, 10; and 13 years, so that all teeth will be treated soon after they erupt.

The theory supporting this procedure is that the tooth enamel becomes more resistant to decay after fluorides have been applied.

Records show tooth decay has been reduced by 40 per cent in large groups of children. It must be emphasized that sodium fluoride is only a partial preventive and that results may vary somewhat among individuals.

Studies to determine the value of applying fluoride to the teeth of adults now are being made.

Another widely accepted method of using fluorides is adding one part of fluorine to a million parts of water in a public water supply.

The American Medical Association, the American Dental Association, and 33 State Dental Societies approve of this method. It should be remembered that this is for prevention and not a cure-all.
The cost per person a year is approximately 10 cents or, the cost for an average town of 10,000 people a day is about 85¢ or, the cost of a single filling will pay for the fluoride for one person for about thirty years.

Children under one year of age will secure full benefits of fluoride-bearing water. Children who are older when fluoride is added to the water will receive substantial protection against tooth decay, but not as much as the younger children. The protection continues throughout life.

You can reduce tooth decay in young children up to 65 per cent. You can cut dental bills for:
1. Filling of teeth
2. Extractions
3. Replacements

You can build healthier children. It is cheaper and easier for children as well as adults, to drink and eat their way to better teeth.

E. A well-balanced diet assures that the food ingredients for proper tooth structure have been supplied.

In general the requirements of an optimal diet for maintaining mouth health are identical with those that promote and maintain positive physical health. Good nutrition requires the selection of foods that provide proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals. These foods essentials may be obtained through a balanced daily diet of the Seven Basic Foods:
1. milk and milk products
2. meat
3. fish or poultry
4. eggs
5. butters or fortified margarine
6. vegetables and fruits
7. whole grain cereals and breads

Available information indicates that diet markedly affects the structure of both Primary and Permanent teeth during the early years of life or before the age of 8.

F. There appears to be at least four nutritional factors important to good teeth and gums.

Calcium and phosphorous are the two minerals regarded as among the major nutritional factors concerned in building good tooth structure.

The mineral of the teeth may increase slightly during a lifetime, but the calcium content of the enamel does not change to any noticeable degree after the tooth has erupted. Neither calcium nor phosphorus are readily withdrawn from the tooth structure by the circulation; however, the supporting bone is subject to release of both minerals.

If a child gets a quart of milk a day and an adult gets a pint a day with an adequate selection of the protective foods, all the calcium and phosphorus requirements of normal nutrition will be met. Therefore, the addition of calcium and phosphorous to a well-balanced diet is not essential.
On the one hand, the body needs abundant supplies of calcium and phosphorus as building material, while, on the other hand, liberal supplies of vitamins are needed to regulate the processes in the building and assimilation.

The two other nutritional factors needed in building and maintaining good teeth and healthy gums are Vitamins D and C.

Vitamin D is essential in the formation of hard dental structures including the teeth. It is also needed to maintain the supporting tissues. Studies show that Vitamin D is beneficial in presenting and arresting tooth decay when the intake of calcium and phosphorus is abundant, and the diet optimal in other respects.

Vitamin D may have to be added to the diet in amounts recommended by a doctor or dentist if an adequate supply is not available from sunlight or fortified foods such as milk and milk products.

Vitamin C is an essential substance while the teeth are in the process of growth, since any deficiency may result in defective dentine. Abundant amounts are also needed to preserve healthy teeth and gums. Studies show that if a low intake of Vitamin C may not be recognizable for some time but that the teeth become loose, tend to soften and suddenly begin to drift apart. The gums and soft tissue may become involved. This may be prevented by proper dental dietary habits of a well-balanced diet including abundant intake of vitamin C foods such as tomatoes, tomato juice, orange juice, and other citrus fruits, green leafy vegetables - especially cabbage, kale, lettuce, turnip greens and broccoli - either raw or lightly cooked.

G. There is strong evidence that an adequate diet is not the only way in which food affects the teeth. A high intake of the protective foods as well as a low consumption of sugar and sweets are both important.

Studies have shown that acids which form on the teeth within a few minutes after sugar and sweets are eaten, are a major factor in causing tooth decay. For this reason, everyone would benefit from the standpoint of general health and especially dental health if the intake of confections were low and other "natural" foods took the place of the refined carbohydrates.

A well-balanced diet contains a sufficient amount of foods rich in carbohydrates without the addition of large amounts in concentrated form such as are found in candies, jams and jellies, pastry, syrup, sweetened beverages and chewing gum. By restricting sweets in a diet, tooth decay has been partially controlled. Fruits, nuts, seeds and popcorn can be substituted for candy. The dietary benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables long have been recognized. Aside from the vitamins and other food qualities which fresh fruit and vegetables contain, they appear to perform other important functions. When an apple, celery or like raw food is eaten:

1. Food particles are scrubbed free from the teeth
2. Gums are moderately massaged
3. Mouth secretions flow more readily
4. Soft tissues of the mouth are stimulated

The mouth and teeth not only feel, but are more clean; Liberal use of the Basic Seven Foods, in well planned meals, may reasonably be expected to assure both better development and maintenance of sound tooth structure and of healthy gums.

III. What can we do to make Dental Care a routine part of normal living?

It is not enough to understand the importance of good, dental care and good dental health—you and the members of your family should be able to give positive answers to all the following questions because their practice should be a part of your daily living.

1. Do you brush your teeth desirably within fifteen minutes after eating?
2. Do you brush your teeth correctly?
3. Do you have a good tooth brush?
4. What is your attitude about going to the dentist?
5. When did you last visit the dentist?
6. Have you had all the recommended dental work done?
7. Do you feel free to ask your dentist questions about yourself; your family?
8. Does your dentist practice Topical application of sodium fluoride?
9. Does your dentist recommend cleaning the teeth every six months; once a year?
10. Have your children had the Topical application of sodium fluoride to their teeth?
11. Do you have a public water supply and if so, has sodium fluoride been added?
12. What kinds of food does your family eat?
13. Do you plan their meals to include the Basic Seven Foods?
14. Do you limit the amount of sweets and sugars in your meals; between-meal snacks?
15. Does your child drink a quart of milk a day; do you drink a pint?
16. Do you plan meals to contain tomatoes, citrus fruits, and raw and cooked green leafy vegetables?

IV. Can you set a goal for your family by selecting two or three of these practices that you are not now doing, but would like to adopt for this year?

Pamphlet--"Drink Away Tomorrows Tooth Decay"

Bulletin--"Progress in Health Services"--from Health Information Foundation, 420 Lexington Avenue, New York 17, New York.

Bulletins--from American Dental Association, 222 East Superior Street, Chicago 11, Illinois
*"The Care of Children's Teeth"
*"Your Guide to Dental Health"
"X-Rays and Your Teeth"
"Attractive Teeth for Young Men and Women"
"Fluoride...less tooth decay"
"Attractive Teeth for Teen Agers"
*"Dental Health for Young American"
"A Dental Health Program for the Community, State and Nation"


*Each Home Economics Extension Office should have a copy for leader reference.