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CHAPTER

17

THE TEETH,
GUMS, AND MOUTH

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THE TEETH, GUMS, AND MOUTH

CARE OF THE TEETH AND GUMS

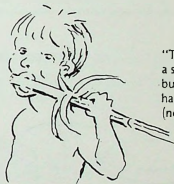
Taking good care of teeth and gums is important because:

- Strong, healthy teeth are needed to chew and digest food well.
- Painful cavities (holes in the teeth caused by decay) and sore gums can be prevented by good tooth care.
- Decayed or rotten teeth caused by lack of cleanliness can lead to serious infections that may affect other parts of the body.

To keep the teeth and gums healthy:

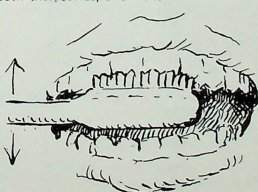
1. **Avoid sweets.** Eating many sweets (sugar cane, candy, pastry, tea or coffee with sugar, soft or fizzy drinks like colas, etc.) rots the teeth quickly.

Do not accustom children to sweets or soft drinks if you want them to have good teeth.



"This child has a sweet tooth—but soon he'll have no more" (no more teeth).

2. **Brush teeth well every day**—and always brush immediately after eating anything sweet. Start brushing your children's teeth as the teeth appear. Later, teach them to brush their teeth themselves, and watch to see that they do it right.



Brush the teeth from top to bottom, like this,

never from side to side.

Brush the front, back, top, and bottom of all teeth.

3. Putting **fluoride** in the drinking water or directly on teeth helps prevent cavities. Some health programs put fluoride on children's teeth once or twice a year. Be sure your children have this done if they have the chance.

CAUTION: Fluoride is poisonous if more than a small amount is swallowed. Use with care and keep it out of the reach of children.

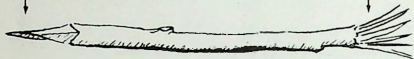
4. Eat foods like amla, orange, lemon, guava, sprouted gram, tomato. These contain the vitamins which are necessary to keep the gums healthy. Ragi and bajra contain calcium which makes teeth strong. If possible, include some milk in your diet.

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A TOOTHBRUSH:

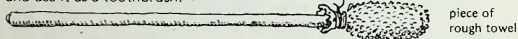
Use a twig of a neem tree, like this:

Sharpen this end to clean between the teeth.

Chew on this end and use the fibers as a brush.

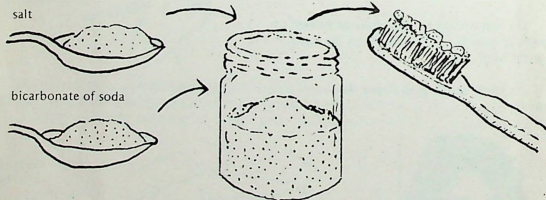


Or tie a piece of rough towel around the end of a stick, and use it as a toothbrush.



IF YOU DO NOT HAVE TOOTHPASTE:

Make a tooth powder by mixing salt and bicarbonate of soda in equal amounts. To make it stick, wet the brush before putting it in the powder.



Salt with soda works as well as toothpaste for cleaning teeth. If you do not have bicarbonate of soda, just use plain salt.

IF A TOOTH ALREADY HAS A CAVITY:

To keep it from hurting as much or forming an abscess, avoid sweet things and brush well after every meal.

If possible, see a dental worker right away. If you go soon enough, he can often clean and fill the tooth so it will last for many years.



When you have a tooth with a cavity, do not wait until it hurts a lot. Have it filled by a dental worker right away.

TOOTHACHES AND ABSCESSSES

To calm the pain:

- Clean the hole in the tooth wall, removing all food particles. Then rinse the mouth with warm salt water.
- Take a pain reliever like aspirin.
- Chewing cloves may help.
- If the tooth infection is severe (swelling, pus, large tender lymph nodes), use an antibiotic: tablets of penicillin (p. 397) or sulfonamide (p. 402), or tetracycline capsules (p.400).

If the pain does not go away or keeps coming back, the tooth should probably be pulled.

Treat abscesses right away— before the infection spreads to other parts of the body.

PYORRHEA, A DISEASE OF THE GUMS

Inflamed (red and swollen), painful gums that bleed easily are caused by:

1. Not cleaning the teeth and gums well or often enough.
2. Not eating enough nutritious foods (malnutrition).



Prevention and treatment:

- Brush teeth well after each meal, removing food that sticks between the teeth. Also, if possible, scrape off the dark yellow crust (tartar) that forms where the teeth meet the gums. Then rinse the mouth with warm salt water.
- Eat protective foods rich in vitamins, especially eggs, meat, beans, dark green vegetables, and fruits like oranges, lemons, and tomatoes (see Chapter 11). Avoid sweet, sticky, and stringy foods that get stuck between the teeth.

Note: Sometimes medicines for fits (epilepsy) cause swelling and unhealthy growth of the gums (see p.422). If this happens, consult a health worker and consider using a different medicine.



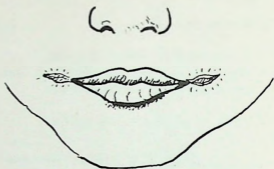
A toothache results when a cavity becomes infected.

An abscess results when the infection reaches the tip of a root and forms a pocket of pus.

SORES OR CRACKS AT THE CORNERS OF THE MOUTH

Narrow sores at the corners of children's mouths are often a sign of malnutrition.

Children with these sores should eat foods rich in vitamins and proteins: like milk, meat, fish, nuts, eggs, fruits, and green vegetables.



WHITE PATCHES OR SPOTS IN THE MOUTH

The tongue is coated with white 'fur'. Many illnesses cause a white or yellowish coating on the tongue and roof of the mouth. This is common when there is a fever. Although this coating is not serious, it helps to rinse the mouth with a solution of warm water with salt and bicarbonate of soda several times a day.

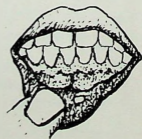
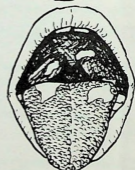
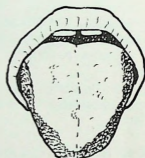
Thrush: small white patches on the inside of the mouth and tongue that look like milk curds stuck to raw meat. They are caused by a fungus or yeast infection called moniliasis (see p. 286). Thrush is common in newborn babies and in persons using certain antibiotics, especially tetracycline or ampicillin.

Unless it is very important to keep taking the antibiotic, stop taking it. Paint the inside of the mouth with gentian violet. Chewing garlic or eating yogurt may also help. In severe cases, use nystatin (p. 408).

Cold sores: small, white, painful spots on or inside the lips and mouth. They often appear when a person has a cold or fever. They last for a few days and go away by themselves.

Rinse the mouth with salt water or put a little hydrogen peroxide or cortico-steroid ointment (p. 409) on the sores. Antibiotics do not help.

Cancer: Chronic sores on the tongue or inside the mouth which do not heal with simple treatment or with nutritious foods may be signs of cancer. These are especially common in people who chew betel leaves, **pan** with tobacco. In such cases consult a health worker.



The book *Where There Is No Doctor* is available
at Rs 29/- plus postage. Multiple copies of reprints
of various chapters are also available.

Please write to:

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