

upon to give instruction, but harmoniously work side by side with its Nursing Department.

I feel I have only touched the extreme fringe of my subject but perhaps to-day I have said sufficient once again to bring before you the need so that you may discuss just how that need can be met. The economic side I have not dared to go into and yet I suppose that perhaps is where we should have begun. But I leave it with you, even that problem someone here may shed light upon. May the day soon come when India will be proud of her Village Nurses and the work they are able to do.

CARE OF CHILDREN'S TEETH

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The main object of this article is to show to the young people how important sound teeth are for good, general health, and to educate them to adopt habits that can save their teeth from decay, other dental troubles, and from pyorrhoea later on in life.

Most people do not realise that their health and happiness depends in the first place on the condition of their mouth and teeth. Sound Health Depends on Good Teeth. The care of the mouth and the teeth is the one great duty that we owe to ourselves, that parents owe to their children, that teachers owe to their pupils, and that Public Societies owe to those for whose welfare they are responsible. It is the teeth that first receive, work upon, and prepare the food which is the nutrition of the body. Therefore, the first, and the greatest step to good health is to possess good teeth.

The mouth is very appropriately called the "Gateway" of the body. The inside of one's body cannot be clean and sanitary if its gateway is in a neglected and filthy condition. Cleanliness of the mouth is very desirable for the sake of general, good health. The mouth is the most favourite place for germs and especially so an unclean mouth. If the mouth is not kept clean each mouthful of food carries these germs to the stomach and thereby cause systemic ailments.

Many diseases of the body like stomach disorders, rheumatism, headaches, etc., are mostly due to bad teeth and that is why doctors nowadays judge a person's health by the condition of his mouth and teeth. It is the general medical opinion that 60 per cent. to 80 per cent. of the disease germs in the blood enter through the mouth. As long as the number of germs in our mouths are kept to a minimum our own blood

can conquer them, but if these germs are allowed to increase and multiply, they become too strong for our natural fighting power in the blood and disease consequently follows.

Most of the troubles of the teeth are due to eating too soft food and not cleaning the mouth and teeth afterwards. The civilised food (dietary) is the greatest enemy of the teeth. Our food is very soft and starchy and so is not properly chewed and liquified with the result that the saliva does not get the chance to work on the starchy food to convert it into a sort of sugar form that the stomach can digest, therefore undigestible food goes into the stomach and we cannot get full benefit out of it. The method of preparation of our civilised food is such that it requires very little effort on the part of the teeth to masticate it. The teeth, as a result, do not get proper exercise. It is the law of nature if you do not utilize a functioning member it will gradually lose its efficiency. Just as, if we do not exercise a muscle, it becomes soft and flabby. In the same way, if we do not use our teeth as nature intends us to use them, our teeth will become weaker, i.e., less resistant and so more susceptible to invasion by germs and the acids which they form in the mouth. The food is so soft that it sticks to the surfaces and between the teeth especially at night time during sleep when the mouth is inactive and more so in children with irregular teeth. These particles are so tiny they are not noticed and the tongue cannot remove them from the surfaces of the teeth. The habit of eating too many chocolates, biscuits, sweets, soft puddings, ice-cream, jam, etc., is responsible for the present-day increasing troubles of teeth.

These fine particles of food undergo fermentation and decomposition and so an acid substance is formed which acts on the outer hard layer of the tooth called enamel and produces a minute hole in it. In this hole more and more food collects from time to time and so more harmful acids are formed by its decomposition, making gradually the minute hole into a big cavity until it reaches the soft central part of the tooth, in which lies the nerve and it is then, that usually the tooth pains for the first time and the individual thinks there must be something wrong with the tooth.

There is an erroneous idea prevalent among people that a tooth is quite healthy unless it causes pain. They do not seem to realise that often a tooth is too far gone by the time it starts aching.

Recently a group of school children in a certain English school and those of a Calcutta school were examined and it was found that 86% of them had defective teeth and gums. One cannot but think of the bad and harmful influences such conditions must be having upon the health of the children. Any defect of the teeth or around the teeth will not only be a source of harm locally, but will also cause indirect harm generally, as it is an established fact that children with bad teeth and those working under the

handicap of neglected and dirty decayed teeth always show weaker results in their examinations than those with good teeth.

In addition to diet defects, the dental troubles among children are also due to, mouth breathing, excessive use of the rubber nipple while in infancy, premature loss of baby teeth, adenoids, enlarged tonsils, lack of exercise, bottle feeding, thumb sucking, and among grown up children, pan (betel) eating.

Pan-chewing is very prevalent in India. It does not do any harm if it is done in moderation, but most people make it a regular habit which is very bad for the teeth. The slices of betel-nut and the remnants of the leaf and other ingredients get packed between the teeth and form deposits on the teeth in large quantities. It stains the teeth red and lowers the vitality and resistance of the teeth and gums and so causes tooth decay and pyorrhea.

There are parents who live in utter darkness as regards the care of their children's teeth and who believe that just because nature has endowed the child with teeth a second time, the baby teeth should be left to take their natural course and thus be automatically neglected with the result that the child cannot chew his food properly. The unmasticated food cannot be well digested and assimilated and so the child is not getting proper nourishment with the result that he remains weak and has frequent digestive disturbances. The condition of the second set of teeth we get depends on the care of the baby teeth.

The above are some of the most important causes of teeth trouble among children. The following lines include steps that should be taken for the care of the teeth.

As a foundation, children should be given nutritive and bone-forming food substances; food which gives plenty of exercise to their teeth like hard crusts of bread made from whole meal. They should also be given fibrous foods that are cleansing to the teeth, *e.g.*, leafy green vegetables and fruit. Vitamins (nerve strengthening elements) are very essential for the general building up of the body and also for the teeth. Our present day food contains very little vitamins. Milk, fresh fruit, green vegetables and whole meal bread all contain vitamins and are therefore good for our systems, and for our teeth. There is a well-known proverb "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" and this can also be said with regard to the dentist. Teeth which have been soundly built out of the best materials and which are nourished with food that has plenty of the necessary elements in it should be able to resist disease.

It has been noticed in certain institutions that children brought up under special dietetic regime do not suffer from any caries and their teeth are perfect.

Children should be taught how to chew their food properly and slowly so that it acts as a natural cleanser, gives the teeth and gums good exercise and massage which promotes healthy blood-supply to the mouth. Blood circulation is nature's way of protecting the gums against infection.

Children should avoid eating too much sugar or any preparation containing a rich supply of sugar like sweets. They should not eat too many biscuits either. Some children have the bad habit of eating such things between meals which is not to be encouraged. Neither should they eat or drink anything which is hot or cold to the extreme. Every meal should end with fresh fruit.

If there is any "crowding" or irregularity of the teeth, the child should be taken care of at once and by timely precautions his teeth can be put right. The trouble is that some parents think it is natural for their child to have irregular teeth and so they leave it at that, but they do not know that the irregular teeth are due, mostly, to some defect in the child's mouth and can be put straight, but only up to the age of 14 or 15 years. The surrounding bone becomes too strong after that age to be interfered with.

It is of the greatest importance to teach children the proper way of brushing their teeth with a good dental cream and a proper kind of brush. The teeth should be brushed after every meal for about 2 minutes, or, at least twice a day, especially early in the morning and the last thing at night before going to bed. The mouth should be rinsed after every meal. There are special brushes made for children but they must always be kept clean as it is useless to brush teeth with a dirty brush. It should be changed as soon as the bristles become too soft. The right way of brushing is to start from the gums and bring the bristles down over the ends of the teeth. On the lower teeth bring the brush upwards from the gum. This method tends to throw the bristles between the teeth where most of the decay starts.

NEVER BRUSH ACROSS THE TEETH. It is the parents' duty to teach their children the right way to brush their teeth and they should watch carefully until the child can himself understand the importance of brushing.

There is no other organ of the body more useful than the mouth. A few minutes' attention to one's mouth every day will make an enormous difference to one's health, efficiency, enjoyment, and later on, in one's earning power and length of life. It will also save you some doctor's bills.

No healthy tooth ever decays from within, so protect it against its enemies on the outside by brushing after every meal.