

THE HEALTH VISITORS' LEAGUE SECTION

Teeth

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The National Museum at Washington exhibits a row of over 200 skulls of Indians who lived between 200 and 300 years ago. Only one tooth in the entire collection of skulls shows dental decay.

Contrast this with the recent study made in West Virginia of 7,059 children in whose teeth 16,151 cavities were found, exclusive of those cavities that had been filled. Undeveloped jaws and irregular teeth were all too frequent.

It is obvious that the Indian boy and girl living 250 years ago had a much better chance to have a perfect mouth of teeth than our children have today.



Scientists have been giving this question serious consideration and are agreed that the cause of dental decay is in large measure due to our civilized diet, and the little need we have today for tearing our food. Our civilization has therefore brought added responsibility, namely the care of our teeth.

Dr. E. V. McCollum of Johns Hopkins University is a nutritionist of wide repute. Quite recently he completed a world-wide study on the care of teeth and at the close of his study, in commenting on his findings, Dr. McCollum offered a definite challenge to the intelligent individual and community when he made the following startling statement with reference to the need for the care of the teeth.

"There is nothing in our national life," he said, "which is more pressing for attention or more important from the standpoint of public health."

CHEW YOUR FOOD

Sound teeth and healthy gums are absolutely essential to personal health. These organs, provided for the processes of digestion, must be able to function properly in order that health may be maintained. Sound teeth are needed for proper mastication which consists of breaking the food into small particles, and grinding and mixing it with the saliva until it is in condition to be swallowed without effort. When the food enters the stomach in this condition the stomach easily continues the process of digestion. However, if the food is not thoroughly masticated, proper digestion is impossible, and proper nourishment is not attained. Intestinal irritation and constipation frequently result. This means a lowering of vitality and a consequent predisposition to disease.

KEEP THE MOUTH AND TEETH CLEAN

The serious results of defective teeth, however, do not stop with faulty mastication. An unsanitary condition of the mouth and teeth presents an ideal medium for the development of germs of disease. Neglect of the mouth converts

cavities in the teeth into receptacles for decaying matter, possibly containing disease-producing germs. Only through the proper sanitary care of the teeth and mouth can the oral cavity be kept in good condition. Proper mastication aids digestion and increases the vitality of the tissues, thus aiding them to resist the attack of disease germs. A lack of cleanliness in the mouth produces decay in the tooth. Once the enamel or outer layer of a tooth is penetrated by decay, the dentine or softer tissue underlying the enamel dissolves rapidly, often resulting in the loss of the tooth. Either the loss of the tooth itself or sensitiveness caused from a decayed condition interferes with the function of the teeth in mastication. There are further results of decay quite as serious. After decay penetrates a tooth toward the nerve, the irritation set up may cause the pulp to die, and with its death, pain for a time ceases. Because this is a great relief to the sufferer, few persons will hurry to the dentist to have the tooth attended to after the pain has stopped. The pulp of the tooth now decays and sets up an inflammation in the adjacent tissue, and frequently forms an abscess. The result is a swelling of the surrounding parts, throbbing pain, feverishness, and loss of appetite. The tooth becomes very sensitive to pressure, the mere act of closing the teeth causing intense pain. The abscess may make an outlet through the bone of the jaw, usually into the mouth. Again the patient is relieved as the pain and swelling may subside. However, the abscess continues to drain infectious material into the mouth and so affects the whole system.

There are many cases where after the pulp has been removed and the tooth filled, an infection starts up around the end of the roots. This infection may affect the rest of the body through the blood and the lymphatic systems. This is the most dangerous kind of decay as it may not cause local trouble at the time, the patient being entirely unaware of the menace to the health of distant parts of the body.

People with decayed teeth and diseased roots are thus frequently subjected to slow poisoning, their health being undermined before the source of the trouble is located. Ailments resulting from the presence of these poisons include chronic tonsillitis, persistent inflammation of the membrane of the throat, and more serious diseases of the joints, the heart and other organs.

Pyorrhea.—A common disease affecting the gums which is another result of the lack of adequate care, is known as *Pyorrhea-Alveolaris*. This is an infection of the gums with characteristic changes in the bony process that holds the tooth in place. The gums retract so that the teeth appear abnormally long. If not attended to, this will result in the ultimate loss of the teeth. More serious still is the general systemic infection of other parts, due to an exertion from the gums. The progress of *pyorrhea* is gradual and not always accompanied by pain, and its presence is not generally recognized until it has progressed to an advanced stage. When such a condition is apparent, a dentist should be consulted at once.

When one considers the serious effects of defective teeth upon general health, the vital importance of proper care for preserving the teeth of the child from babyhood is apparent.