

THE HEALTH VISITORS' LEAGUE SECTION

Teeth—(Continued)

*Prepared by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1 Madison Avenue,
New York City*

Importance of Diet:—Unfortunately, there prevails a common belief that children's first sets of teeth are unimportant, and that the care of these teeth is not necessary until the second teeth appear. As a matter of fact, attention should be given the child's teeth, not only from birth, but before the child is born. It is of the utmost importance that the pregnant mother select her diet from food with a high calcium content, such as milk and fresh vegetables, in order that the tooth-forming salts may be supplied in the necessary amounts.

Dr. E. V. McCollum states that the vital food elements found in milk are necessary and should be liberally used by both expectant mothers and nursing mothers on account of the necessity of building the proper foundation for sound teeth in children before they begin to protrude through the gums. Few people realize that the mother's food before birth has a very important influence on the teeth of the child. All the crowns of a child's first or temporary teeth are formed, and four of the second or permanent set, namely, the first or sixth year molars, are partly developed before the child is born.

After birth the diet of the child is important. Dr. Jesse Williams, Professor of Physical Education at Columbia University, points out that oral hygiene is too often viewed merely as a "tooth-brush affair," and that the importance of dietary factors is forgotten. The cause of dental decay often comes from the use of too much candy and soft foods. Candy is detrimental to the teeth, mainly because it is usually eaten between meals and the child has no appetite for the next meal. Deterioration of the teeth may be due to what is omitted from the diet as well as to what the diet contains. We know that dental decay was experienced by our earliest ancestors, but not to the extent it is at the present time. We attribute much of the dental trouble to deficient dietary factors. Therefore, it is extremely important that children especially should have food which contains an adequate amount of tooth-building material. Milk is of first importance. Vegetables, such as spinach and carrots should be used, and may be fed to very young children if put through a colander to be rendered more easily digested. Coarse food is beneficial because it requires mastication. The observance of these rules, together with the regular use of the tooth-brush, and a regular visit to the dentist to have the teeth cleansed and beginning decay checked, will insure good teeth.

Oral Hygiene for Children:—First of all, oral hygiene is as important for the health of the child as for the health of the adult, for the same general reasons. The proper development and care of the temporary set of teeth is necessary and important. These first teeth determine the size and shape of the upper and lower jaw bones. Of utmost importance is the fact that if the temporary teeth are lost too early, the jaws do not obtain their proper growth and there is not sufficient space for the eruptions of the later teeth of the

second set. This brings about irregularities of the permanent teeth with malformation of the face. The significance of oral hygiene for children cannot be over-estimated. In Bridgeport, Conn., where very accurate statistics have been kept, it was found that the average number of cavities in the teeth of all school children in the fifth grade was 7 plus. Such a condition is at once reflected in the children's health, both physical and mental. Care of the teeth and mouth means better bodies and better minds. It was recently demonstrated in this city of Bridgeport, where a five-year program of oral hygiene was carried on, that the health of the children was so improved that the cost for the re-education of backward children was reduced from 40 per cent to 17 per cent.

The following rules are those with which competent dentists are in essential agreement :—

RULES FOR CARE OF TEETH

1. Brush the teeth daily, preferably after each meal. Use a rather stiff, small brush with uneven bristles and thoroughly cleanse all surfaces of the teeth. A rotary and up-and-down motion should be used. Never neglect to brush the teeth the last thing at night, as this is the most important time.
2. One should have two or three tooth-brushes, to be used alternately, this will give time for the bristles to dry out thoroughly.
3. Use a paste or powder that is not scratchy.
4. Floss silk should always be used between the teeth to remove all particles of food. Care should be taken not to injure the gums.
5. An alkaline mouth-wash, such as lime water, is useful before retiring.
6. Cleansing of the tongue with a tooth-brush or tongue scraper assists in the removal of decomposing material that at times causes foulness of breath.
7. Examination of the teeth by a good dentist every six months, preferably every three months, is strongly advised. Attention to this matter will prevent many defects from occurring. If evidence of dental defect develops, immediate attention should be given to it.

The teeth are among our most precious natural possessions. They can be saved only by persistent care and attention to the maintenance of a sanitary condition of the oral cavity.

This is worth a prodigious effort when we know that upon an intricate chain of sound digestion, one of whose vital links is the masticating apparatus, depend the beauty, vigor, and health of the human body and mind.

The Infant Mortality in the following provinces was:

Madras Presidency in 1928, 184 per 1000 births.

Assam " 172 " " "

Central Provinces " 238 " " "

Burma " 269 " " "

Bengal had 229,078 deaths and 1,286,863 births, in 1927.