Be Dental with Yourself!
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HEALING

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You don't have to set records to keep your teeth in shapeSubheading

Devananda Tandavan M. D.

Dental problems seem to be more common with the diet and nutritional levels of today's urban populations. These dental problems begin with plaque, a colorless (sometimes yellowish) film that covers the teeth. It comes from the interaction of saliva and food and contains many bacteria which feed upon fermenting carbohydrates. As they grow and produce waste products in the form of acids and enzymes, these break down the proteins that cover and protect the teeth and also "eat away" teeth calcium.

As the tooth surfaces are destroyed, cavities are formed. Also as tartar (hardened plaque) builds up along the gum line, irritation of the gums occurs. If this continues, "pockets" are formed where more exposed surfaces are damaged by the accumulation of food and plaque. To interrupt this chain reaction that produces harm to the teeth, we must: brush teeth correctly, floss frequently, eat an adequate nutritional diet and see the dentist at least every six months. It is recommended that we have two brushes--in order that they

can dry adequately between use-- with soft, well-rounded and polished tips.

The purpose of brushing is to remove the plaque by purely mechanical means. Studies show that the optimum brushing time is five minutes. Toothpaste is not an ideal cleanser for most people. A suggested cleanser is five parts baking soda (bicarbonate of soda) and one part salt. Oil of wintergreen or peppermint, cinnamon, cayenne pepper or other kitchen flavors may be added for taste, but never sugar. Baking soda helps to keep the gums healthy and free from inflammation. There has been a great deal of study on fluoridation, but there is still controversy about its use. Ingested fluorine does not help after the teeth have formed. Fluoride in tooth paste and topical solutions is discouraged because a child may swallow enough to approach a toxic dose. After the teeth have formed, use of fluoridated water is of doubtful value.

Ideal times for brushing are immediately after meals as well as morning and night. If we are unable to brush after meals, the mouth should be rinsed thoroughly and interdental stimulators used. These are small, soft, wooden wedge-shaped dental picks, not the usual tooth pick. They are available at most drugstores. The important thing is to remove food particles from between the teeth and around the gum line.

To properly brush the outside of the teeth, we should hold the brush at a 45 degree angle, pointing toward the gum line. Use a gentle circular or wiggle motion. Do not press too hard. Use short, angled strokes to clean the outer surfaces of the back teeth and to remove plaque from the inner surfaces of the

back teeth. Then scrub the chewing surfaces of the teeth with the brush held flat. Tilt the brush to clean the inner surface of the front teeth. Also brush the tongue.

Daily flossing after brushing the teeth will help remove residual plaque from between the teeth and under the gum line where the brush is not effective. Unwaxed floss is probably better as it absorbs fluids and small particles. Hold the floss firmly and use a sawing motion between and behind the back teeth. Scrape the sides of the teeth with an up and down motion, but be careful not to cut into the gums. This flossing may at times produce a little bleeding, which is proof that the treatment was needed. If bleeding should continue, see your dentist.

Dentists today can provide a plastic coating that protects the tooth enamel. These sealants are usually applied to the chewing surfaces of a child's permanent back teeth to seal off bacteria. Dr. Leonard Cohen, chairman of the University of Maryland Oral Health-Care Delivery says, "Sealants are for anybody who wants to try to do everything possible to prevent cavities--they're not just for children. Adolescents and adults who are cavity-prone could use sealants as added protection. Ask your dentist." Enjoy your brush with health!

Dr. Tandavan, 78, retired nuclear physician and hospital staff president, lives in Chicago, where he specializes in alternative healing arts. If you are interested in further articles on health and healing visit his home page.