

Your Dental Health

The contents of this series of "Dental Health Talks" was originally prepared by the American Dental Association. They are made available for Tundra Times through the Public Health Education Office of the Alaska Native Health Service.

It is well known that our dental health program in Interior Alaska has not yet reached everyone needing dental services. This is especially true about the people in the rural communities. However, everyone understands how important it is to take care of our teeth which is a part of our total well-being.

No. 6 - Plaque Control Through an Oral Home Care Program

It is now possible for you to see you mouth's worst enemy - plaque.

By chewing a simple tablet containing a harmless food coloring, the film of bacterial plaque that is stuck to your teeth will show up as red stains.

Your job, if you want to prevent tooth decay and gum diseases, is to remove the plaque and keep it off through a regular home care program.

The tablets are called disclosing wafers because they disclose the location of the transparent plaque. The wafers are part of an easy, efficient oral hygiene program that you can follow to make sure you never have to lose your teeth needlessly.

Plaque is constantly forming on your teeth so you have to get into the habit of getting it off. Dental experts tell us that if we can control the plaque problem we can look forward to a full set of healthy teeth for a lifetime.

Once your dentist has cleaned your teeth professionally and removed all the mineralized deposits known as calculus or tartar, it is a relatively easy job to keep your teeth clean for the next six months or so.

The first line of defense against plaque is your toothbrush. Brushing must be very thorough and reach all accessible surfaces of the teeth. Your dentist or dental hygienist can tell you the method of brushing that is best suited for you.

A recommended manner of brushing for most people is a simple back and forth stroke ranging from a short gentle scrub to a vibratory motion. Dental authorities emphasize the thoroughness of the cleaning, the end result, more than the particular

brush movement used to get teeth clean.

For most people, a soft multi-tufted brush with rounded-end bristles should be used. In certain instances the dentist may recommend a different type of brush.

Ask your dentist about the disclosing wafers, or you can buy some at your drugstore. Chew the tablet until it dissolves in your mouth and then swish it around.

The first time you use it you will probably be surprised at the glowing red areas that indicate accumulated plaque and food debris you didn't reach. Brush again to remove all of the red stain the brush can reach.

Dental floss or tape will help you remove plaque from the hard-to-reach areas between the teeth and near the gumline. These are common places for decay and gum disease to begin.

A complete and thorough plaque removal using a toothbrush and dental floss should be accomplished a minimum of once a day.

The family dentist or one of his auxiliaries can demonstrate proper methods of plaque control, including proper flossing. Incorrect flossing can injure sensitive gum tissues. Until the child has demonstrated the ability to floss and brush effectively, the parents must assume the responsibility of plaque removal.

The best hope for preventing tooth decay and gum disease today is in oral hygiene. This means the combined care provided periodically by the dentist and daily by the patient.

(Next article: "Nutrition and Dental Disease")