

Your Dental Health

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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. 15 - What Not To Do For A Toothache

Anyone who has ever experienced the grim middle-of-the-night toothache knows how a sufferer will grasp for straws in his quest for a pain reliever until the dentist can be reached.

Toothache has been called one of the three or four most unbearable pains in man. The problem is usually decay destroying the tooth.

Toothache is not the same as the pain experienced when you sip hot or cold drinks, suck in cold air or eat sweet, sour or acidic foods. This is a hypersensitive tooth and almost everyone has had one of these "tender teeth" in his life. Children's teeth especially are sensitive to abrupt temperature and taste changes.

True toothache is an intense pain in the tooth or jaw. It can begin for no apparent reason, from eating hot or cold foods or from the pressure of chewing.

A swollen jaw and some fever accompanying the toothache usually means an abscess has formed. In an abscess, the decay has eaten through the pulp and has infected the gums and hard tissues below. A pocket of pus may form adjacent to the tooth root.

The first thing to do when you have a toothache is to call the dentist. There are several

ways to make the pain more bearable until the dentist can be reached, although none will take the pain away completely.

Because many people who hurt often look first to home or "folk" remedies, let us explore several ways not to treat a toothache.

Probably the most dangerous home remedy for relieving the pain of toothache is placing an aspirin directly on the aching tooth or allowing it to dissolve in the mouth. Aspirin can irritate the gum and actually burn the oral tissues.

Aspirin is an effective pain reliever but it must work within your system. It must enter your bloodstream to do any good.

One of the most popular folk remedies is swishing a mouthful of whisky around the aching tooth. This will not relieve pain at all unless taken in massive doses. The reason people sometimes think the whisky does relieve tooth pain is that the alcohol burns the gums and by contrast the tooth seems to hurt less.

On the positive side, there are several things you can do to make the pain more bearable. Aspirin taken with plenty of water is your first friend.

Children may be given one-to-four baby aspirin, with dosage depending on the child's age and weight. Adults should take two aspirin. The dosage may be repeated every three or four hours, four or five times a day.

Oil of clove, sold in drug-stores, also is of help. Saturate a small cotton ball with the oil and with a tweezer gently pack the wet cotton into the cavity.

If the pain stops suddenly, it does not mean that the tooth has cured itself. See your dentist immediately regardless.

Decay causes toothache, and decay can be prevented through good dental care. Maybe you have had a toothache. Your child need never know the meaning of the word if you start him now on an effective program of oral hygiene.

(Next article: "Why Today's Dentistry Seldom Hurts")