

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. 14 - Dentifrices

Much has been written and said recently about abrasiveness of toothpastes. Toothpastes must have some degree of abrasiveness to enable them to assist the brush in removing plaque and stains. If only a slight degree of abrasion is necessary to keep teeth from staining, baking soda can be used.

It is known that excessively abrasive toothpastes may be harmful to softer tissues of exposed root surfaces and restorative materials. For any one individual, the most desirable toothpaste is the one which is abrasive enough to prevent plaque and stain accumulation but not so harsh that it injures teeth or gums.

The family dentist can recommend toothpastes that are within the proper range of abrasiveness, based on the patient's individual needs.

Some toothpastes can do more than serve as an aid to mouth cleanliness. There are several toothpastes that offer proven decay-preventing benefits. They are fluoride toothpastes.

The American Dental Association continually evaluates commercial toothpastes. The Association's Council on Dental Therapeutics permits the use of its seal and acceptance statement on products that have proven in clinical studies their effectiveness in reducing tooth decay.

It should be emphasized, so there is no misunderstanding, that fluoride toothpastes are not a substitute for the fluoridation of community drinking water. Water fluoridation has been shown to reduce dental decay by as much as 65 per cent. Used together, fluoridated water and an accepted fluoride toothpaste can have a compounded value in reducing dental decay.

Burned egg shells, stags' horns, mice, lizards and flour of pumice - this was the recipe

for one of the first "tooth-pastes" formulated by the Romans.

The ancient Greeks and Hebrews, as well as the Romans, are known to have cleaned their teeth with toothpicks, chew sticks and sponges.

In the Fifth Century, a dentifrice used to correct halitosis (mouth odor) was the ashes of a rabbit head and three mice mixed with an equal amount of marble dust, all of which was moistened with water.

Today's modern dentifrices are in two forms, paste and powder. Pastes are by far the most popular and widely used.

Thorough cleaning of teeth helps control the buildup of dental plaque - a sticky, almost colorless film that forms continuously on teeth and which leads to both decay and gum disease. To aid in the prevention of these diseases, bacterial plaque should be removed from all tooth surfaces using dental floss and a toothbrush a minimum of once a day. For some people, more frequent removal may be recommended by their dentist.

While dental decay is the major cause of tooth damage and loss among children and young adults, gum diseases - known also as periodontal diseases - are the major cause of tooth loss among adults. Inadequate oral hygiene, particularly the accumulation and mineralization of bacterial plaque, is an important factor in the cause of periodontal disease just as it is in tooth decay.

Toothpastes, by themselves, can do very little to clean teeth. Removal of plaque and stains is mainly through the action of dental floss and the toothbrush. Yet, toothpastes can enhance scrubbing power and make toothbrushing more pleasant.

(Next article: "What Not To Do for a Toothache")