

Proper food, proper care, destroys plaque

By Dennis Dussman D.M.D.

Many times people will come to the NSB Dental Clinic and ask, "How and why do my teeth decay and what can I do to stop it?"

Tooth decay is one of the most prevalent diseases of mankind. It usually begins in the pits and grooves of the chewing surfaces of the teeth. Without treatments, brushing and flossing it will then begin between the teeth just below the points where one tooth touches the next. As time goes on the plaque will begin to decalcify the smooth parts of the teeth along the gums.

The decay is caused by the action of the germs (bacteria or sugar bugs to the ECE classes) which lodge on the less exposed surfaces of the teeth. These germs act on the foods and sugar on the teeth to form a plaque. This is usually clear and colorless, but can be stained by the dentist to show where you are not brushing. The germs produce acids and toxins that irritate your gums and soften (decalcify) and destroy the tooth surface, forming the hole that is tooth decay.

As we all know, the enamel (the outer surface of your teeth) is the hardest part of the body. Once the germs get beyond the enamel they move very quickly to decay the softer inner part of the tooth (dentin). It begins to hurt when the decay (caries to the dentist) gets closer and closer to the nerve and blood supply (pulp) of the tooth. This is a warning that the tooth is saying it is being attacked and losing the battle.

This is why it is important to see the dentist *before* your tooth begins to hurt. Many times people come in to me when they are in pain and many times it is too late.

SO HOW CAN I AVOID LOSING MY TEETH AND PREVENT TOOTH DECAY?

- 1) Every day eat the proper foods from these groups: Meat, Fruit, Vegetables, Bread, Cereal.
- 2) Stay away from sugar, snacks, gum, candy, cakes, cookies, or sugar cereals, or eat them after meals and brush after.
- 3) Brush and floss your teeth each day.
- 4) Have regular dental check-ups before the teeth hurt.

REMEMBER: NOT LONG AFTER YOU EAT THE PLAQUE BEGINS TO EAT YOU!!!

Many patients also ask the question, "Why do I have so many cavities - my teeth have been filled?"

Many times wear and tear take their toll on dental restorations. Do you realize your teeth and fillings are in constant use 24 hours a day?

As we all know, almost everything a dentist does is too late. A silver filling (Amalgam) or plastic filling (Composition) can repair a broken-down tooth, but can never be as good as the original. A restoration placed by a dentist can last for many years if taken care of and maintained.

SOME TIPS:

- 1) Watch what you eat. A filling is hard and durable, but cannot hold up under hard foods such as frozen

fish or frozen maktak.

- 2) The original cause for the filling is still there. Plaque! One might say, how can the filling decay? Remember, the filling is placed into the tooth. Without proper brushing and flossing caries can recur around the filling or on another surface.

SO, REMEMBER, IF YOU WANT THE FILLINGS TO LAST YOU MUST MAINTAIN AND KEEP THEM CLEAN AND WATCH WHAT YOU EAT!

Recall really means . . . we care.

If you see the dentist regularly, you probably have started to receive our recall postcards in the mail. We are pleased to see the response. We are setting aside Wednesday mornings for our recall patients to give them a check-up. A recall card means we care and would like to remind you that it's time to check those fillings and clean your teeth. A regular dental check-up and good care on your part will help keep those teeth for a lifetime.

So, when you call, please tell Mabel, our Office Manager, that you received a "recall" card and would like to make an appointment to have a check-up.

I'm pleased to see the fluoride rinse and tablet program off to such a good start. Our Hygienist, Sharon, is still working on getting permission slips for some of the children.

Let's all pull together for better dental health on the North Slope and get those permission slips in. If you can't remember signing one, ask your children and get it in. Help us help the children to have the benefits of fluoride.

Don't let it be *your* child with a toothache.

Thanks... and keep on brushing!

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