

## **A New Column—**

# **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. 2 — Dental Diseases**

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Dental diseases are the nation's most prevalent health problem. Few people, about one in 100, reach adulthood without suffering decayed teeth or developing diseases of the gum and other teeth-supporting tissues.

The massive nature of the problem is tragic in view of the fact that dental scientists over the years have perfected the field of preventive dentistry to such a high degree that most people never have to lose a single tooth to decay or gum diseases.

But, despite this impressive progress there are alarming indications that improvements in the nation's dental health are not keeping pace with the scientific advances of recent years. The majority of Americans do not practice proper home care, nor do they seek the professional care needed to prevent dental diseases.

The price people pay for this neglect is staggering:

- Better than one out of every two Americans over the age of 65 has lost all of his natural teeth.

- More than 20 million of the nation's 110 million adults have lost all their natural teeth. Of the remaining 90 million, 25 per cent have destructive periodontal disease.

- Half the children have decayed teeth by age two. When they reach school age, the average child has three decayed

teeth, and by age 15 the average youngster has 11 teeth decayed, missing or filled.

Approximately 50 per cent of school-age children are victims of gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) which can lead to progressive periodontal (gum) disease, the major cause of teeth loss in adults.

One reason for these appalling statistics is that more than half of all children under the age of 15 have never been to a dentist. (In our area this figure is higher). For children in poor families, the problem is far worse. Seven out of 10 of them never get to see a dentist.

Many young men never receive adequate dental care until they join the armed forces. Selective Service records show that an average group of 100 recruits needs 500 fillings, 80 extractions, 85 bridges and 20 dentures.

The articles in this series will show you how to avoid the pain of tooth decay and the infection and bleeding of diseased gums and how to preserve your teeth for a lifetime.

(Next article: "What is Dental Plaque?")

If you have any questions please write to:

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