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The Teeth and Health



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THE TEETH AND HEALTH

PREVENTION is the watchword of today. Prevention is the portal through which mankind must pass in order to enter the hacienda of health. I can remember as a child hearing my grandmother say that if our foresight was one-half as good as our hindsight, we would save ourselves much misery. Needless to say, if our foresight in respect to both sickness and health was one-half as good as our hindsight, a large percentage of our sick beds could be relegated to the museum of antiquities; a preponderance of prescription pads and their pernicious partner the patented pill would soon become as antediluvian as transportation by ox team or model T's. Hospitals could be transformed from havens of helplessness to halls of health. Health workers, of which there are about 1,300,000 in this country, including physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists and members of associated professions, could devote their full time to the promotion of health and prevention of pain instead of battling bacteria and waging war on wanton disease and death.

Modern medicine and modern dentistry are striving toward the goal of prevention: Prevent disease, prevent illness, prevent accidents, prevent all those destructive conditions which impair health and happiness. The word "prevention" should be made as much a part of our health vocabulary as it is a part of our prayer book. "Keep us from sin, O Lord," we plead in daily prayer. Keeping ourselves from becoming ill should be common practice in daily life. If appraisals are made of a child before he shows signs of illness, the application of existing scientific knowledge may often prevent the development of disease and defects which might seriously hamper him throughout the remaining years of his life. This, of course, calls for a better understanding and a more thorough knowledge on the part of all of us regarding our human machines. In fact, knowledge of the human machine is more important to the welfare of the child and the adult of today than ever before. Changes in social and economic relations, changes in housing and transportation, changes in nutritional problems come so suddenly that the only chance for adjustment lies in intelligent action based on knowledge. One of the important recommendations made a few years ago at the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection was that a working knowledge of the human machine and what keeps it running smoothly should be counted as important for school children as the three R's.

Once we realize that a normal child is one that is sound in body and in mind, harmoniously developed physically, mentally and emotionally, we will have hurdled the first barrier to prevention of disease. Contrary to traditional belief general superiority of intellect is today thought to be found in persons who are also superior in other respects, as in physical health and social adaptation. In other words, the intellectually superior child who is sickly, a poor mixer or otherwise inferior, is now considered not the rule, but the exception.

The normal, healthy, happy child, the type most likely to develop into the best citizen, the backbone of the nation as it were, must be mentally and physically free from disease. Every sick spell, every accident to the human flesh, leaves a scar of some kind which the individual carries for the remainder of his life. Sometimes, those scars are very, very minor and do not affect the efficiency. Quite often they are of such magnitude that the recipient suffers consciously or unconsciously from them for life. Many of you listening in today know someone in your family or circle of friends

who is suffering from some serious disability such as heart trouble or kidney trouble which he would have escaped had he applied the proper preventive measures.

One of the simplest and most effective preventive measures within the reach of us all is mouth sanitation. There is no doubt that infected, neglected teeth cause a great deal of unnecessary illness. Not long ago, Dr. Rosenow, of the Mayo clinic, an authority in medical and dental research, stated that a sane and comprehensive effort toward preventing and eliminating infected areas in the body "will often result in the prevention and cure of chronic diseases; in the alleviation of human suffering; in a better preservation of the tissues of old age; in a longer average duration of life, and in increased mental and physical efficiency, and will, through the laws of heredity, make for a sturdier race." Since dental foci of infection is so common, it is quite obvious that, in its prevention, we automatically, in many cases, prevent the more serious systemic diseases. Remember, then, in your efforts to bestow gifts on your children, that good health is the greatest gift of all. No person, no family, no country can progress for long without it. It is estimated that there are about 45,000,000 children in the United States, and authorities say about 22 per cent, or 10,000,000, of them are suffering from some form of ill health. Poor nutrition, defective speech and weak hearts are found in 80 per cent of these sick children.

Of the 35,000,000 children who are supposed to be reasonably well, about 90 to 95 per cent have dental defects. The Committee on the Costs of Medical Care has found that "people suffer much unnecessary pain and many obscure disorders because of bad teeth." Yet, let us repeat, about 90 per cent of children of school age average as many as four decayed teeth each. One of America's greatest medical authorities makes the statement that a large percentage of the diseases which affect the human system can be traced to the mouth. The same authority also says that the difference between a well-cared-for mouth and an unhealthy one is ten years of life.

Let us stop for a moment, repeat and analyze those three statements: (1), People suffer much and unnecessarily because of bad teeth; (2), A large percentage of human diseases can be traced to the mouth; and (3), Between 90 and 95 per cent of school children have badly decayed teeth. Those statements or facts mean something. Briefly they mean this: We, as parents, are directly responsible for much of the diseases visited upon our children simply because we do not recognize the fact that the condition of the child's teeth directly affects the child's general health. Since it is true that a large percentage of our human diseases can be traced to bad dental conditions, the logical thing for us to do, since we are interested in our children's welfare, is to prevent their teeth from decaying. By so doing, we will automatically prevent much of the disease that human flesh is heir to. Unfortunately, we do not know at the present time the actual cause of decay; and until we do know the actual cause we probably will have great difficulty in entirely overcoming it. We do know, quite definitely, how to prevent serious dental decay for a large majority of our children. By employing four simple rules in the daily life of each child, we can provide them with better teeth.

First, we must provide the child with proper nourishment. Teeth are composed largely of calcium or lime and phosphorus. These two minerals are obtained from foods. Therefore we must provide the child, both before birth and for at least the first sixteen years of life, a sufficient amount of those foods which are high in calcium and phosphorus in order that the

bones and teeth may be well nourished. Generally speaking, that means plenty of milk, vegetables, fruits, whole grain cereals and breads, meat and eggs.

The second preventive measure which every parent should employ to assist the child to have good teeth is exercise—exercise of the jaw bones and supporting tissues about the teeth. Eating a certain amount of coarse foods each day, or each meal stimulates the jaw muscles and gums and helps keep them healthy.

The third preventive measure is cleanliness. While in a general sense, it is not true that a clean tooth never decays, it is true that clean teeth are less likely to decay than are unclean teeth. From a hygienic and esthetic standpoint, teeth should be thoroughly brushed at least twice a day. The fourth preventive measure is early and regular dental attention. To paraphrase an old and popular maxim—"A stitch in time saves nine" we can say "A trip in time saves nine." One or two early trips to the dentist before decay has progressed very far not only will save your child several long and painful trips later, but they may also save him from contracting some serious physical disability resulting from infected teeth.

Ex-President Hoover once said: "Human progress marches only when the children excell their parents." One way to provide your children with better health than your own is to provide them with better teeth and to prevent those teeth from decaying and infecting their bodies.