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FOLKLORE
AND
FALLACIES
IN DENTISTRY



PART of the folklore of every country is superstitions about teeth. Though once they were earnestly held to be true, now we smile at such beliefs as these:



A child is destined to travel far if his teeth stand far apart or to remain at home all of his life if his teeth stand close together.

A baby whose upper teeth appear before his lower ones brings great danger to his mother's brother.

Dental diseases are caused by worms in the teeth.



If the godfather fasts on the day a child is baptized, until the ceremony is over, the child's teeth will be healthy and protected against worms.

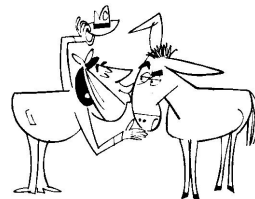
Rubbing the brains of a hare on the gums makes it easier for a child to cut his teeth and will make an adult's teeth grow again where they have been lost.

Tooth powder should be made from burnt hare's head and three mice. (This was the prescription of Hippocrates, the father of medicine.)



If you have a piece of bread in your pocket while you are taking part in a funeral, you should not eat the bread. If you do eat it, your teeth will become hollow and fall out.

A root of parsley hung from the neck is a talisman against toothache.



Kissing a donkey relieves toothache.

Cut the gums with an iron nail until they bleed and drive the nail, with the blood upon it, into a wooden beam. Then you will never have a toothache again.

If your teeth bother you, just run three times around the church without thinking of a fox.

Unfortunately, many of the things we think we know about the teeth today, while not so amusing or so transparently false, are untrue—and harmful. For instance, the belief that loss of teeth is inevitable discourages many people from giving their teeth the kind of care that would prevent this loss.

On the following pages are some of the fallacies about teeth that are still widely believed—and the facts.

Fallacy: A mother loses a tooth for every child.

FACT: There is no foundation for this statement. It simply is not true.

Fallacy: Pregnancy increases tooth decay.

FACT: If tooth decay increases during pregnancy, it probably is because of poor mouth hygiene or increased eating of sweets. Both home and professional dental care are as important during pregnancy as at any other time.

Fallacy: It's not important to take care of baby teeth because they will be replaced anyway.

FACT: It is just as important to take care of baby teeth as of permanent teeth. The first teeth are needed, like the permanent ones, for chewing, for speech and for appearance. In addition, they maintain the shape of the jaws so that the permanent teeth will erupt in the proper position.

Fallacy: "Six-year" molars are eventually replaced by permanent teeth, so it is not necessary to take care of them.

FACT: "Six-year" molars are permanent teeth, the first that appear in the mouth. They will never be replaced, except by artificial teeth.

Fallacy: Drinking lots of milk prevents tooth decay.

FACT: Milk is an excellent food, but it does not prevent tooth decay. Milk is the best dietary source of calcium, which is needed to build both teeth and bones. The teeth are all formed and calcified by about age 13. Once decay starts, no amount of milk will repair the cavity or stop its progress. The bones require calcium throughout life because they are constantly rebuilding themselves. Calcium also is needed for other body processes throughout life.

Fallacy: Eating foods with plenty of vitamins and minerals will prevent tooth decay.

FACT: After all the teeth are formed and calcified, diet has little effect upon the teeth, except that excess sugar

plays a part in the development of decay. However, a balanced diet is needed throughout life for the health of all of the tissues of the body, including the gums and other mouth tissues.

Fallacy: Teeth decay because they are soft.

FACT: There is little difference in the hardness of teeth, and this difference has no bearing on tooth decay.

Fallacy: Large fillings weaken the teeth.

FACT: Unfilled cavities weaken the teeth much more than large fillings do.

Fallacy: The best times to brush the teeth are before breakfast and before going to bed.

FACT: To be effective, brushing should be done immediately after eating. Bacteria in the mouth quickly turn fermentable carbohydrates, especially sugar, to acid, which attacks the enamel of the teeth. Eventually, these acid attacks result in decay. Therefore, it is essential to prevent formation of the acid by removing food particles from the mouth as quickly as possible after eating.

Fallacy: Toothbrushing completely prevents the deposit of tartar on the teeth.

FACT: It is unlikely that brushing alone will completely prevent the deposit of tartar, nor can it remove hardened tartar from the teeth. Only a dentist or a dental hygienist, using special instruments, can remove the hardened tartar.

Fallacy: A toothache does not necessarily require the attention of a dentist, since it will often disappear by itself.

FACT: A toothache is nature's warning that something is wrong. Even though the pain may go away for a time, a dentist should be consulted. Toothache may occur because decay has started and is working its way toward the pulp, which contains the nerve. If the pain stops after a few days, it may mean that the pulp and the nerve are already destroyed by the disease. Or pain may be caused by the pressure of an abscessed tooth.

Periodontal disease (of the gum or bone surrounding the teeth) may cause pain that is felt as a toothache. If heat or cold causes pain in a tooth, the advice of a dentist should be obtained.

Fallacy: When a toothache occurs, it is too late to save the tooth, which must be removed.

FACT: Sometimes this is true, but usually the tooth can be saved by proper treatment.

Fallacy: It is not important to replace a back tooth that has been extracted, because it doesn't show.

FACT: If a missing tooth is not replaced with an artificial tooth, the other teeth tend to drift into the empty space. Once they are out of their proper position, there is likely to be too much stress on certain teeth when food is chewed. This causes further displacement of the teeth and injury to the bone and to the tissues that attach the teeth to the jaws. Also, food is more likely to become packed into the spaces between irregular teeth, and this leads to more decay. Food packed between the teeth also irritates and injures the gums and the bone; such continued irritation is one of the causes of periodontal disease, or pyorrhea.

Fallacy: Everybody can expect to lose his teeth and to have to wear dentures eventually.

FACT: Teeth were meant to last a lifetime. And they will, with proper home and professional care. If followed, three rules for dental health are effective in helping the individual to keep his teeth. These rules are: Cut down on sweets, especially between meals. Brush your teeth immediately after eating. Have regular dental checkups. Drinking fluoridated water or, where that is not available, having topical applications of fluoride is of great benefit in reducing tooth decay among today's children. The benefits of fluoridated water are lifelong for those who drink it from birth.



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