



THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HEALTH

WITH INSIGHTS FROM THE
1930'S & 40S



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HISTORICAL TIES TO WW2

"If we didn't have good dental health, it was near impossible to do what we had to do. And now, we know that dentists are more important today than we ever did back then." - Howard Sarty, letter to his wife, World War II soldier



In the early 1900s, only about 7% of American households practiced tooth brushing or had toothpaste available. During World War I, a large number of Army recruits had extremely poor oral hygiene, causing the military to view dental disease as a major problem nationwide. The role of dentistry during World War II is often overlooked, but it had a significant impact on oral health in the years that followed.

In England during WW2, a toothache suffered by the commander of the First Army highlighted the lack of dentists in the military. To address this, twelve dentists were sent to France and linked to the Royal Army Medical Corps, and from there on dental officers became an integral part of the military. From 1942 to 1945, dentists provided over 69 million restorations, 16 million extractions, and millions of dentures. Although many soldiers feared dental visits, the aid provided by dental officers was not only important for their daily functioning but also helped prevent future health complications. Without their efforts, soldiers would have endured severe tooth decay, mouth pain, and poor oral hygiene, which could have increased the challenges of battle.

The innovations in dental treatments during the war, such as the introduction of new drugs like penicillin and streptomycin, led to increased awareness of dental hygiene among military personnel. This knowledge was then brought back by soldiers into civilian life, gradually spreading to ordinary citizens and helping to prevent tooth and mouth diseases for years to come.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ORAL HEALTH

Oral health is a crucial aspect of well-being and quality of life. Tooth decay, which is mostly preventable, is one of the most common health issues worldwide. Your oral health can give clues about your overall health because your mouth is where bacteria first enter your body. If you don't maintain proper oral hygiene, bacteria can increase and lead to problems like gum disease, tooth decay, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory infections.



WHAT IS A “HEALTHY MOUTH”?

Having a healthy mouth and strong teeth is important throughout your life because they help you breathe, talk, and eat. In a mouth that's healthy, the tissues are moist, without any smell, and free of pain. This includes the gums, teeth, and supporting bone. Healthy gums should be firm, not red or swollen, and should not bleed when brushed or flossed. Teeth should be firmly attached to the gums and bone, and it shouldn't hurt to chew or brush them. The most common oral diseases are tooth decay and gum disease, but good oral hygiene, regular dentist visits, a healthy lifestyle, and avoiding things like too much sugar and tobacco use can help prevent these problems.

CONNECTION BETWEEN ORAL & OVERALL HEALTH

Given the potential outcomes of untreated oral diseases such as pain, lower quality of life, missed school or work, and disruptions to family life, it's important to maintain good oral hygiene. Periodontitis, a severe gum disease, can result in tooth loss and damage to the tissues and bones supporting them. Research suggests that oral bacteria and inflammation from periodontitis may play a role in the development of other diseases, although the exact relationship is unclear.

ORAL HEALTH CAN CONTRIBUTE TO OTHER CONDITIONS:

- **Cardiovascular disease**
 - Some studies suggest a connection between heart disease, clogged arteries, stroke, and inflammation caused by bacteria in the mouth.
- **Endocarditis**
 - This infection can happen when bacteria from the mouth travel through the bloodstream and attach to the heart.
- **Pregnancy & birth complications:**
 - Periodontitis has been linked to premature birth and low birth weight.
- **Pneumonia**
 - Bacteria in the mouth can be breathed into the lungs, resulting in pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses.

CERTAIN HEALTH CONDITIONS CAN AFFECT ORAL HEALTH:

- **Alzheimer's disease**
 - Oral health tends to worsen as Alzheimer's progresses.
- **Diabetes**
 - Diabetes weakens the body's ability to fight infection, increasing the risk of gum disease.
- **Osteoporosis**
 - This condition weakens bones and is linked to loss of bone in the gums and teeth.
- **Rheumatoid Arthritis**
 - RA can make gums and jaw joints swollen, which raises the chance of gum problems and cavities.
- **Eating disorders & certain cancers**
 - These conditions are also associated with worsening oral health.

NUTRITION & ORAL HEALTH



What you eat and drink plays a significant role in the health of your mouth and teeth.



Fruits and vegetables are good for your teeth because they contain a lot of water and fiber, which can help balance out the sugars they have. They also help clean your teeth by stimulating saliva, which washes away acids and food particles that can cause decay. Plus, fruits and veggies contain vitamin C, which helps gums heal, and vitamin A, which is important for building strong tooth enamel, the tough outer layer of the tooth.

Calcium and phosphorus are essential minerals for dental health, as they safeguard and repair tooth enamel. Consuming foods rich in calcium, like cheese, milk, plain yogurt, calcium-fortified tofu, leafy greens, and almonds, can contribute to dental health. Additionally, protein-rich foods such as meat, poultry, fish, milk, and eggs are excellent sources of phosphorus, which also supports tooth health.

Water, especially fluoridated water, is the best drink for your teeth. It helps to keep your mouth clean and fights against dry mouth. Fluoride is necessary throughout life to defend teeth from decay. Drinking water with fluoride is a simple and effective way to prevent cavities, making it one of the easiest and most beneficial actions you can take for your oral health.



BEST PRACTICES FOR MAINTAINING ORAL HEALTH

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day for two minutes each time, using a soft-bristled brush and fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss daily to remove food particles.
- Use mouthwash to clear leftover food after brushing and flossing.
- Limit sugary foods and drinks by eating a healthy diet.
- Replace your toothbrush every three to four months.
- Schedule regular dental checkups and cleanings.
- Avoid the use of tobacco products.



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