

Illustrated information sheet on how to control and prevent dental problems in Kenya. Colour lithograph by Mazingira Institute, ca. 2000.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG, HEALTHY TEETH

Everybody knows that a balanced diet is needed to keep you in good health. The first thing we do with food, as we put it in our mouth, is to chew it. That's why we need good healthy teeth, to break our food up into small pieces, so it can mix with our saliva - making it easier to swallow and digest.

Teeth enable us to speak clearly and normally. Try saying 'mouth teeth' aloud - and quickly! Now, imagine saying it without teeth!

Teeth also help to shape our faces and affect our appearance - so let us take a closer look at them!

UNDERSTANDING OUR TEETH

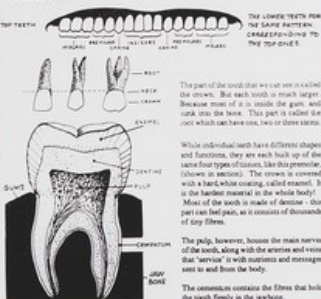
We each have two sets of teeth in our lifetime. The first set of teeth are called 'baby' teeth, or primary teeth, which first appear in the mouth of the infant around the age of six months onward. The child usually has the complete set of 20 primary teeth at about two to three years old. All these teeth have names, and they are grouped like this:

THE PRIMARY SET



THE PERMANENT SET

The primary teeth begin to be lost, or shed around the age of five to six years old, and are replaced soon after by the permanent teeth. The full set of thirty-two permanent teeth will fully emerge to be complete during the late teenage years, and in principle should last a lifetime! Permanent teeth are a long time in the making - a period which lasts approximately eighteen to twenty years! Now let us look in more detail at the individual teeth that make up the set of thirty-two permanent teeth. There are three main types of teeth: the 'cutters' (incisors), the 'grinders' (molars), and the 'crushers and grinders' (premolars and canines).



How to Control and Prevent Dental Problems

The basic responsibility for maintaining good oral health lies with each of us as individuals. This is why it is so important that our children should continue to be helped and taught from the very earliest ages to assume personal responsibility for the care of their teeth.



Virtually all the main dental diseases are controllable today. The most common ones, like tooth decay and gum diseases, can be treated in a relatively simple manner. Now that we understand more of the clinical nature of dental diseases, it is possible for community health workers to provide excellent treatment - without having to spend large amounts of money on expensive equipment and costly materials. If you eat a balanced diet daily, you keep your body healthy - so that your teeth and gums have the resources to resist infection. A balanced diet is the daily intake of body-building foods (protein, energy foods (carbohydrates and fats), and protective foods (vitamins and mineral salts). Milk, for example, contains all these things - making it a good food for children.

THOROUGH DAILY CLEANING OF TEETH TO REMOVE PLAQUE IS THE ANSWER

Along with a nutritious diet - this is the soundest way to prevent dental diseases and avoid problems. It does not really matter which method or tools you use to clean your teeth, as long as they are regularly cleaned, one way or another...

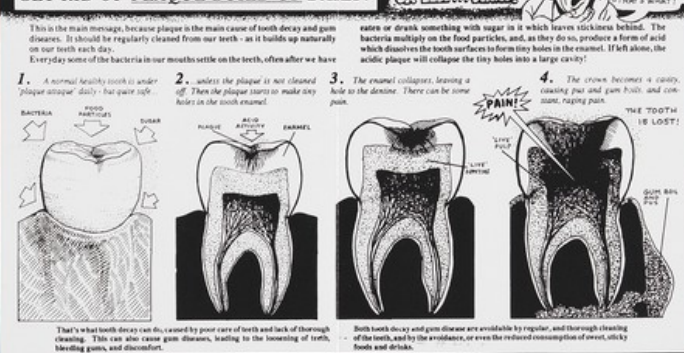


CHOOSE A TOOL THAT REALLY WORKS!



Some people like to use 'muskis', others a toothbrush and toothpaste. It doesn't matter what you use, as long as the end result is a clean mouth and good oral health, one way or another. A good toothbrush should have a straight handle, a flat brushing surface, flexible bristles, and be able to reach all the corners of the mouth.

GET RID OF PLAQUE BUILD-UP DAILY!



That's what tooth decay can do, caused by poor care of teeth and lack of thorough cleaning. This can also cause gum diseases, leading to the loosening of teeth, bleeding gums, and discomfort.

Both tooth decay and gum disease are avoidable by regular, and thorough cleaning of the teeth, and by the avoidance, or even the reduced consumption of sweet, sticky foods and drinks.

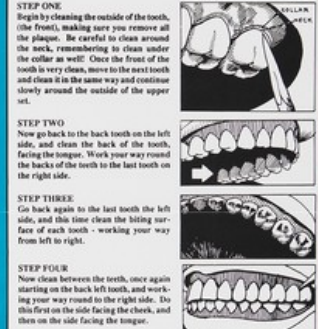
When a tooth has constant contact with SUGAR, LIKE WITH SWEET STICKY FOODS OR DRINKS, YOU INCREASE THE NUMBER OF TIMES ACID CAN ATTACK THE ENAMEL COATING.



If you were asked to clean a plate after you have eaten, as long as the end result is a thoroughly clean plate, it does not really matter how you did it - or what you used. The same applies to teeth.

A GOOD WAY TO CLEAN TEETH...

Always start at the same place. Make it a routine - always the same way of doing it. Let's start on the upper left side, with the last tooth at the back.



YOU ARE NOW HALF WAY - THIS COMPLETES THE CLEANING OF THE UPPER TEETH ONLY. FOLLOW THE SAME STEPS WITH YOUR BOTTOM TEETH!



IS IT REALLY 'NEVER TOO LATE TO START'?

It is never too late to start cleaning your teeth and gums as thoroughly as described above! WITHOUT PLAQUE (gums) NO DECAY CAN OCCUR. The regular daily removal of plaque simply controls tooth decay and gum diseases, in most cases. If decay has already started, and THERE IS A HOLE IN THE TOOTH, the plaque in and around the cavity must be thoroughly removed. This is THE FIRST LINE TREATMENT - keeping the mouth, and particularly the cavity, clean. Once 'plaque control' has been achieved, you can then move to THE SECOND LINE OF TREATMENT - which often means seeking PROFESSIONAL HELP.