

# Schools Observe Nat'l Children's Dental Health Week

School children across the state as well as the nation will be learning new ways of taking better care of their teeth during National Children's Dental Health Week, February 5-11. And they will be learning, in most cases from the people whose business it is to know—dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants.

In many counties teachers will welcome these dental health experts into their classroom to discuss dental health and to demonstrate sound methods of oral hygiene according to Dr. E.A. Pearson, Jr., Director of the State Board of Health's Dental Health Division.

Schools in Yancey County will have a dental hygienist visiting during the week to talk to students about better dental care.

The theme of the American Dental Association for this year is "Smile America". In order to give North Carolina children something to smile about, the Dental Health Section, N.C. Division of Health Services, has adopted the slogan, "Snack Right for Dental Health." Schools across the state will observe the special week by contests, posters, skits, bulletin boards and making their own nutritional snacks.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Craig Phillips is urging school systems across the state for their continued support or initiation of a Preventive Dental Health Program. The Steering Committee for a Preventive Dental Health Program. The Steering Committee for a Preventive Dental Health Program for North Carolina Children has pledged a reduction in dental disease in the population 20 years of age and under, and a 40% reduction in dental disease in the population of ten years of age and under. Members of the steering committee are comprised of representatives from the N.C. Dental Society, Dept. of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina School of Dentistry, Dental Health Section of the Dept. of Human Resources, Dental Assistant Association, North Carolina Dental Hygienists, and the N.C. Association of Local Health Directors.

According to State Superintendent Phillips, over 4,000 elementary teachers and teachers in day care and headstart centers have been trained in preventive dental health in special workshops where they learn dental disease processes, plaque control techniques, the relationship of good nutrition to dental health, and methods of teaching preventive dental health. Preventive dental health education was provided to 230,000 children in grades K-6 during the 1976-77 school year by a state employed staff. Also a sodium fluoride mouthrinse program is now being administered to 286,845 school children in 800 schools in 70 counties, and the program is growing.

Questions-Answers

The dentist has told us that our 18-year-old son has gum disease. How can this

develop in someone so young?

Gum disease accounts for the greatest amount of tooth loss in adults, but it also affects children. According to recent U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare statistics, approximately 68 percent of the nation's youth have some visible form of periodontal or gum disease—generally of a mild type. Unfortunately, unless preventive measures are taken, the disease progresses over a long period of time with little or no pain, destroying the gums, bone and other structures that support the teeth. Often a large percentage of periodontal problems in later life can be traced to neglect or improper care of the mouth during childhood.

The problem begins with dental plaque which is the sticky, colorless substance that forms constantly on everyone's teeth. The bacteria in plaque utilizes the sugars you eat to produce harmful acids that attack the teeth and cause caries. But this same substance also irritates the gums, making them tender and likely to bleed. If plaque is not removed daily by careful brushing and flossing, it will thicken into a deposit called calculus. As the calculus accumulates, the gums slowly detach from the teeth leaving deep pockets where bacteria and debris collect.

Eventually, if left untreated, the tissues and bones around the teeth are destroyed and healthy teeth loosen and are lost.

There generally are two stages of periodontal disease: Gingivitis or inflamed gums and periodontitis which involves the bones supporting the teeth.

The best method of prevention is regular brushing and flossing, regular visits to your family dentist, and proper nutrition.

Our Student Council has been asked to consider the removal of candy bars from vending machines in our school. What effect do such snacks have on our teeth?

Snacking on candy bars or sugary soft drinks is probably the worst thing you can do to your teeth.

Each time you eat foods containing sugars, certain bacteria in the mouth are stimulated to create acids that

attack the tooth enamel. This bacteria is found in a sticky, colorless film called plaque that forms continuously on everyone's teeth.

The greatest damage occurs within the first 20 minutes after eating sweet foods. So the more often you eat foods containing sugar, the more often the acids have an opportunity to accumulate on your teeth to act on the enamel.

One answer to the problem is to limit the number of times you eat sugary foods each day. In other words, confine your intake of sugary foods to regular mealtimes and avoid those between-meal snacks.

Instead of selecting sweets in the vending machine or at the corner snack shop, look for sugar-free candy or gum and soft drinks, fresh fruits, milk, cheese, soda crackers, potato chips, popcorn or peanuts.

I was amazed to learn recently that it may be harmful to my baby's teeth to give him a bedtime bottle. Can you explain why?

The content of the bedtime bottle may be harmful to your baby's teeth. An infant who is given a bottle at bedtime can be a prime candidate for rampant dental decay, a condition called "nursing bottle mouth."

This is because as liquids containing sugar are consumed, they combine with the plaque that constantly grows on the surface of the teeth. The sugar from the liquid interacts with the bacteria in plaque to form acids that eat away at the tooth enamel. The length of time these acids are in contact with the teeth is a major factor.

Normal bottle feeding does not contribute to this condition since the baby who takes a bottle while awake swallows the fluids quickly. But if he is drowsy, or asleep, his normal salivary flow and swallowing processes decrease. The tongue and the nipple tend to pool the sugary liquid around the top front tooth which are the ones most frequently affected.

If you feel that your baby receives comfort and security from a bedtime bottle, fill it only with plain water. Fluids containing sugar such as

formula or fruit juices can cause decay—particularly if they remain in the mouth for an extended period of time.

To save your baby's teeth, remember to cleanse his mouth and teeth after each feeding with a clean cloth or gauze pad.

In addition, check content labels on baby foods. Look for foods that do not contain sugar.

I have heard conflicting stories about the dangers of radiation. Is exposure to dental X-rays harmful?

Dental x-ray examinations made with modern methods and safeguards pose no danger to your health. Your dentist and his staff have been trained to prevent unnecessary radiation and to plan carefully to use the least exposure possible. The amount of radiation which reaches the more sensitive cells of the body is only a small percentage of the annual natural background radiation to which man is inherently subjected.

As part of his training, your family dentist has had extensive instruction and experience in the operation of x-ray equipment and interpretation of x-ray films. In addition, he and his staff are always alert to any potential hazards to patients through the use of radiation equipment. The American Dental Association, for instance, advises that leaded aprons be used on children and adults of childbearing age.

You can be sure that your dentist will not recommend the taking of x-rays unless he feels they are absolutely necessary for the diagnosis and a subsequent course of treatment.

With the aid of x-ray films, your dentist can detect the beginnings of tooth decay, abnormal growth conditions—including unerupted or mal-

positioned teeth—or abnormalities like tumors and cysts before they have an opportunity to grow and create more serious problems.

Through the use of x-ray examinations your dentist can help you keep your teeth healthy for a lifetime.

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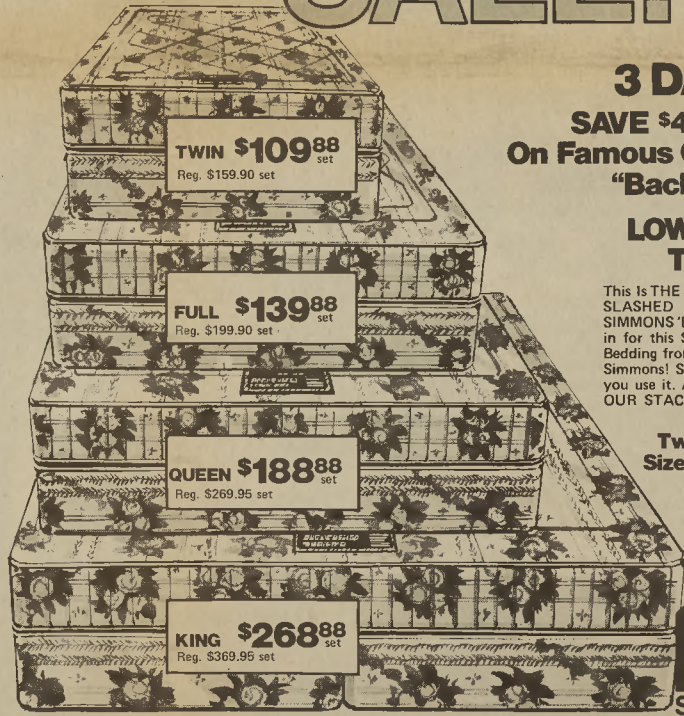
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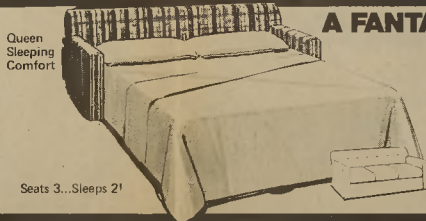
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