

HOW TO PRESERVE THE TEETH.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



PERSONALLY I have always had the greatest aversion to medicine—that is, to taking it. Oh! prescribing it to others is quite another thing.

“Take it; the lamb!”—thus my nurse used to address me over a glass of castor oil—“and he shall have lollipops, and a ride in dadda’s dog-cart.”

I cannot promise you a ride in “dadda’s dog-cart,” reader, but if you take your little monthly dose of physiology, and take it quietly and kindly, you shall have something nice to follow—something which shall quite put the taste of the nastyology out of your mouth, and out of your mind.

A tooth, then, is composed of three different structures, or tissues—viz., the main portion, which is called the ivory or tooth-bone; the enamel, which forms a crust, as it were, over the whole exposed portion of the tooth. This enamel it is which gives to the teeth their chief beauty, or pearly appearance; it is most beautifully seen in the teeth of young dogs. The third structure is the cementum; this covers the roots, fangs, or unexposed portions of the teeth. Every tooth is hollow in the centre, being filled with what is called the pulp—a collection of cells, blood-vessels, and nerves, which are conducted to this hollow or central portion by a minute canal, which runs up through the roots of the teeth. This is all you need bear in mind, for our present purpose, about the structure of the teeth.

It may seem very hard, but it is none the less true, that we are only allowed two sets of teeth to last us a whole lifetime, and if we need any more we are to apply to the dentist for them. It is the object of this paper to show you how you can preserve your own natural teeth, and thus be independent of any dentist.

I have heard of babies being born with a fully-developed set of teeth; I have heard a great many things which I do not believe. Before telling you the time at which you are to expect the appearance of the milk teeth or the permanent teeth, let me try to explain to you the names they generally go by in medical phraseology. The incisors are what are commonly called the front, or cutting, teeth; behind them are the canine teeth—the pointed ones—we all know those; behind the canines are the first and second bicuspid, or anterior grinders—very handy teeth indeed; pity it is they should usually be the very first to decay. Behind these again come the first and second molars—back teeth, or big grinders; and last of all, and farthest back, come the third molars—the *dentes sapientia*, or wisdom teeth, so called because they seldom appear before we are twenty-one, and either married quite, or

thinking about getting married. The lower posterior molars have only two roots or fangs, and quite enough, too, you will be inclined to think when you are having one pulled; but the molars in the upper jaw have three fangs, and sometimes four—it is terrible to think of!—and you need twice as much nerve and courage to have one of them taken out. Now, an adult has, altogether, thirty-two teeth, and a child or young person has only twenty.

The average period of the appearance of the child-teeth is something like the following:—Seventh month, two middle incisors; ninth month, two lateral incisors; twelfth month, first molars; eighteenth month, the canine; twenty-fourth month, the two last molars. The permanent or adult teeth take longer time to come, and appear in about the following order:—Sixth year, the first molars; seventh year, the two middle incisors; eighth year, the two lateral incisors; ninth year, the first anterior molars; tenth year, the second anterior molars; eleventh year, the canine; twelfth or thirteenth year, the second molars; seventeenth to twenty-first year, the wisdom teeth.

It has been said by a great physician that no one could be prevailed upon to take any trouble about his health, until death had once stared him in the face. Let us hope that the good doctor talked rather too figuratively. Nevertheless I’ve often been distressed to think how very little attention people as a rule pay to the commonest laws of health, and goodness knows they are simple enough! It does not even comfort me to think that if every one were wise and healthy, the world would soon be over-stocked, and the struggle for existence greater than it is now.

“Cleanliness is next to godliness,” runs the proverb, and I’ve heard a man make this remark, who positively was rubbing his face with a wet towel, because he was too lazy to wash it. Will nothing ever convince men and women that, in order thoroughly to enjoy the *mens sana in corpore sano*, they *must* go in for thorough and complete ablution by bathing every morning of their lives? But if people are for the most part neglectful of their skin, tenfold more so are they of their teeth.

If you, young lady, are only careful of your teeth now, and cultivate habits of cleanliness as regards them in the way I shall point out, I can promise that you will have them still good, and nearly intact, when you are an old woman of ninety going on two sticks.

I myself had a feeling of pity for that ancient dame who was asked by a young man if she possessed any teeth.

“Na, na, my laddie,” was the reply.

“Because,” the youth added, “if you had any teeth I might have married you.”

“Bide a wee!” cried the old lady eagerly, with a finger in her mouth—“I’ve some old stumps back here!”

Not only is digestion interfered with, from improper mastication of the food, but cases of dyspepsia may often be traced to this cause, combined with carious or decaying teeth, which actually poison the food that was intended for the nutriment of the body.

The tooth-brush is as much an indispensable article of the healthy toilet as is the hair-brush itself. Tooth-brushes should not be too hard, as they injure and sometimes indurate the gums; neither should they be too soft, else they are useless. *In mediis tutissimus ibis.*

There is one thing which a great many people seem to forget, and that is that the inside and the crowns of the teeth, too, want cleaning as much as the outsides, although the outsides only are seen. You ought, therefore, to provide yourself with both outside and inside tooth-brushes, which can easily be procured at any respectable chemist's. Never buy a cheap article; it is dear in the end. Avoid india-rubber tooth-brushes; and remember always to rinse the brushes in cold water after using the brush. Perhaps it may be an additional inducement to the reader to be careful in cleaning the teeth, to inform him that parasites of a very ugly form indeed take up their abode in the human mouth where cleanliness has been neglected.

Brush the teeth at least twice a day, and after every meal it is a capital plan to rinse the mouth with pure cold water—no, not rose-water.

A tooth-brush crescentic in the formation of its surface is a handy one, so also are those right and left-handed ones with bevelled edges, as they do not injure the gums.

What tooth-powder is best? Well, the simpler it is the better, and some people very wisely use nothing at all but pure bicarbonate of soda. This is excellent, although the taste is objectionable. Avoid tooth-pastes as a rule, and all powders the composition of which you are not acquainted with; they often put a beautiful pearly surface on the teeth at the expense of the enamel. Here is a simple powder and a good one:—Prepared chalk, half an ounce; orris-root and magnesia, of each one quarter of an ounce—mix. If the teeth be much discoloured, get your chemist to add a little powdered cuttle-fish. Camphorated chalk is also very simple, and as good as simple. Rinsing the mouth occasionally with a wash of half an ounce of tincture of myrrh to six ounces of pure water, is a good preservative for the gums.

Neglected teeth, especially in some delicate states of health, are said to secrete "tartar." This is no secretion, but a deposit of the salts of the saliva. If there is much of it, the teeth must be scaled by a proper dentist; if not, brushing the teeth with a soft brush, dipped in weak acetic acid, will have the desired effect.

Some people are afflicted—for it is an affliction, and a very great affliction too—with a foul breath. This may arise either from the lungs, a disordered stomach, or from ulcerated throat or gums, or from decayed teeth. Be the cause what it may, no time should be lost in applying to a properly qualified medical man, to have that cause removed, or something much worse may follow. A solution of chlorinated soda, used as a gargle or wash, will sweeten the breath temporarily; but, depend upon it, this is merely trifling with what may turn out to be the symptoms of some severe disorder.

Be very careful in your choice of a dentist. There is no trade more overrun with quackery—dangerous quackery—than that of dentist.

Never attempt to crack nuts with your teeth. You may crack the teeth instead, and some day, when you have forgotten all about the nuts, you will probably be surprised to find the half of one of your best teeth drop off.

Avoid toothpicks as much as you can. Use a quill if anything. Never under any consideration use a pin. Do you know what may happen to you if you do? Why, *odontalgia*, *caries*, *gomphiasis*, *odontophlegmone*, and *odont*—Oh, don't? well, I won't; but you musn't use pins for toothpicks; you wouldn't like to have *rhizodontology* performed on you, would you?

Give you a cure for toothache? Well, I'm sure I wish I could. You see toothache is of various kinds, and arises from various causes. If the teeth are decayed, they had better be cleaned and stopped, and they will last you for life. If the toothache proceeds from inflammation, rinse the mouth frequently with a strong solution of bicarbonate of soda in hot water; take a strong aperient in the shape of Epsom salts; stop the tooth with cotton-wool steeped in chloroform, or creosote, oil of cloves, cajeput oil, or tannic acid in ether. If you think it proceeds from neuralgia, take an aperient, and several large (3 or 4 grain) doses of quinine, and continue the quinine three times a day, in one-grain doses, for a fortnight after the toothache has gone. It ought to be comforting to know that if attention is paid to the state of the stomach and general health, if plenty of exercise is indulged in, if we are temperate in eating and drinking, and *take our morning bath* pleasantly, neither toothache, foul breath, nor spongy gums will ever be our unhappy lot; and, as an Irishman would say, the only tooth-powder we'll want will be clear cold water.

One word in conclusion to so-called "martyrs with toothache." Get the tooth out. Don't hesitate a moment. Go to the most respectable dentist within a radius of ten miles, and ask him to extract the offending molar.

