

Oral Health: A MUST

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“Complacent Smile” on the face of Sri Lankan people has become famous all over the world. A smile on a face reflects many things to others. Anybody can have a nice smile if he/she has a healthy and neatly arranged set of teeth. There are many among us who are unable to gesture with a smile, although many would be happy to do so. The reason behind this is the unhealthy and incorrectly located teeth. It is therefore, fortunate to have healthy and well set teeth.

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some of them. Most of these are preventable. Maintaining good oral hygiene is not a complex issue, and it needs only a commitment. Oral diseases cause physical strain to some people, while for a few other people, oral diseases create psychological as well as sociological

problems. It should be noted that Sri Lanka has a well organized country-wide government dental service, while the private sector also provide dental services. The government which provides a free service to the people, has made a large financial commitment for this purpose. Unfortunately the proportion of the Sri

Lankan population that utilizes this free service is very low. This may be due to their negligence and ignorance.

Many oral diseases are linked to lifestyle and the unfavourable behavioural patterns of the people.

Sri Lanka being a developing country saddled with economic burdens and a long drawn out civil conflict, has to resolve the high priority problems of poverty and malnutrition. In this scenario, Sri Lanka has to consider and concentrate on developing and adopting simple low-cost methods to contain oral diseases, that bestow economic benefits to the individuals as well as to the country as a whole.

It is clear that mass media has to play an important role in propagating the correct information about food habits and their link to oral diseases. Advertisements on food items and commodities such as toothpaste and tooth brushes often give the wrong signals to the general public. The type of social marketing that is common today tends to present a distorted picture of food ingredients and oral practices. Unfortunately the public health services are not geared to deal with such malpractices in the trading of consumer goods that are inimical to public health.

Sri Lanka is also constrained by a shortage of trained dental doctors to meet the demand for dental services.

The percentage of people subjected to dental disorders are quite high, while the number of persons taking treatment are relatively low. Hence the need for a concerted effort to popularize the importance of good

oral hygiene, especially among the poorer segments of the population.

All expectant mothers must be made aware of the need to maintain good oral health to ensure that their new born babies will not be subjected to oral diseases. For this purpose the nursing staff attached to the District Medical Officer divisions as well as other outreach health care personnel such as midwives, should be mobilized to achieve this major task of improving the oral health of people.

In Sri Lanka pre-school education begins with children of the 2 ½ to 3 year age group. Health



statistics show that most of these affected children do not get proper treatment. It is here that proper awareness among mothers can make an impact of improving childrens dental problems. The deployment of mobile dental services in pre-schools can also be helpful in preventing dental diseases.

About 50 years ago, a school dental health service was initiated. Unfortunately this service had not been properly utilized, probably due to attitudinal changes resulting from the current system of competitive education. The adverse consequences of neglecting oral health during childhood are realized during adolescence when they begin to be conscious of their personality and appearance.

It is evident that at the outset children should be encouraged to make good use of the school dental clinics. This service could be used by school children from year one to year 11. Thereafter there should be follow-up programmes to keep young people continuously reminded of the need to ensure oral health.

Another important aspect of oral health is the type of food consumed by children. It should be the responsibility of the teaching staff of schools and parents to supervise the school canteen and regulate the type and quality of food items served by these food outlets to the students.

Foods with excessive sugar as well as soft



drinks should be strictly controlled, while milk and milk based food items should be given preference. Creating good food habits for children during their school days, can have a lasting effect on the lives.



Thus a child trained on correct health practices from the stage of an infant to adolescence can face the society with confidence as an adult. The knowledge on good health practices should be continuously updated with well planned awareness programmes. If such programmes are conducted at national level, the general public will be able to share the benefits of a healthy nation.



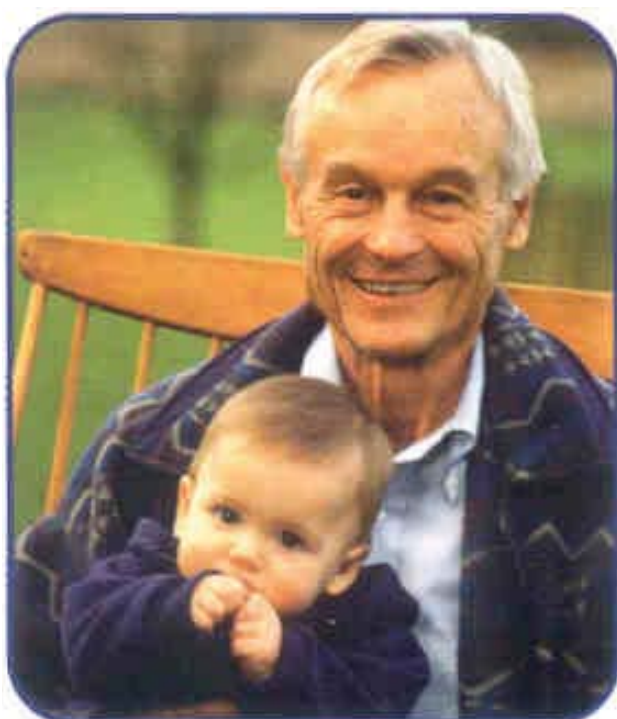
There is a popular saying that “Healthy permanent teeth are for lifetime”.

Adults must be aware of the dangers of periodontal diseases and mouth cancers, which become chronic with ageing. Since Sri Lanka's life expectancy has now reached very high levels,



and are on par with the highly developed countries, the importance of retaining a healthy mouth and a sound set of teeth is evident for a happy old-age existence. The simple steps to be adhered, to ensure healthy teeth, can be summarized as follows:

Brush the teeth in a proper manner twice a day using a good toothbrush and toothpaste. Control consumption of sugar-based foods (sweets). Check the mouth once a month, and consult a dental surgeon if you see any doubtful symptoms. Keep away from smoking, chewing betel and eating of hot meals, and finally ensure meeting a dental surgeon at least once in six (06) months.



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The body in decline

- Brain** Gradually shrinks as brain cells become smaller. More than 30,000 neurons die each day. Their passing goes unnoticed because each person has perhaps billions of neurons, but accumulated loss might ultimately lead to memory problems and other dysfunctions.
- Face** Buildup of fat cells creates bags under the eyes and a double chin: lips lose fullness.
- Skin** Loses moisture and elasticity and becomes thinner, so wrinkles develop.
- Bones** Become thinner and more porous – making them prone to fractures – as mineral content declines.
- Muscles** Declining blood supply, dead nerve cells and waning testosterone result in decreased muscle mass and strength
- Breasts** Tissue degenerates after menopause, causing breasts to sag and wrinkle
- Arteries** building of calcium and fatty tissue raises blood pressure and decreases oxygen and nutrients reaching the body's cells
- Heart** Grows less efficient as its valves become thicker and less elastic
- Lungs** Extra secretions and declining elasticity can cause breathlessness and heightened risk of bronchitis and pneumonia
- Stomach** Less digestive juices are produced and elasticity diminishes, making it harder to absorb nutrients
- Hearing** Sounds might become duller or distorted; rapid speech and foreign accents become difficult to follow
- Sight** Corneas thicken and lenses distort, causing nearsightedness; colours fade and peripheral vision shrinks
- Touch** Sensitivity diminishes as skin thins and cells and nerve endings die

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