

On Nutrition: by Helayne Waldman, Ed.D., N.E.

The Tales your Teeth Tell

At the turn of the last century, a brilliant and successful dentist in Cleveland, Ohio took off on a bold journey. Dr. Weston Price had been concerned at the growing incidence of dental decay he observed on a daily basis in his successful practice. Price also noticed a strong correlation between dental health and physical health: a mouth full of cavities generally went hand in hand with a body full of disease, or an overall frailty and propensity to illness. Being an adventurous sort of fellow, he decided to close up shop in order to travel the world to study the “people with fine teeth.” Little did he realize how far and wide his travels would take him, and the invaluable lessons he would bring home.

These lessons and his genius in learning them resulted in the publication of a classic text, *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*. They also earned him the posthumous title, “The Charles Darwin of Nutrition,” or as some prefer, the Father of Preventive Dentistry.

Dr Price’s ultimately visited and studied fourteen different cultures. From indigenous tribes in Africa to Eskimos in Alaska, from the Swiss Alps to the Polynesian Islands, Dr Price sought out isolated populations in an attempt to uncover the factors responsible for their healthy teeth. And healthy teeth they were. In fact, the further from “civilization” that these populations resided, the fewer cavities he found. What Dr. Price did find was straight teeth, healthy gums, healthy bodies and virtually no incidence of heart disease, diabetes, or cancer.



Regrettably, Price made another shocking discovery. Once a typical “Western” diet hit the shores of these remote areas, the diseases of western civilization took up residence with a vengeance. Within the space of a single generation, in fact, teeth became crowded, faces narrowed, immunity was reduced, and heart disease, diabetes, cancer and alcoholism became commonplace.

What was their secret? Notes Dr. Stephen Byrnes: “Of course, the foods that Price’s subjects ate were natural and unprocessed. Their foods did not contain preservatives, additives, or colorings. They did not contain added sugar (though, when available, natural sweets like honey and maple syrup were eaten in moderation). They did not contain white flour or canned foods. Their milk products were not pasteurized, homogenized, or low fat. The animal and plant foods consumed were raised and grown on pesticide-free soil and were not given growth hormones or antibiotics. In short, these people always ate organic.”

So if you’ve been wondering what’s really at the root of your latest root canal, you may wish to look no further than your kitchen table.

A Powerful Predictor

Since Price’s time, much more research has been done into the connection between dental health and overall well being – a good deal of it brought to light just within the past decade or so. Take, for example, a study reported on in the *Journal of Peridontology*, in January of 2002, which sought to find out if chewing gum might increase the number of endotoxins that migrate from the mouth to the bloodstream. Endotoxins are poisons released into the bloodstream by the bacteria that cause gum infections. This, the researchers explained, could help explain the “abnormally high blood levels of some inflammatory markers observed in patients with periodontal disease” And in fact, stirring up the bacteria in patients with gingivitis did indeed result in higher levels of circulating endotoxins in their blood.

Earlier research had already noted that people with periodontal disease were more likely to suffer strokes and coronary artery disease, two conditions stoked by the fires of inflammation inside blood vessels, as well to other ailments. The same journal, for instance, reported a year earlier that as the incidence of gum disease went up, so did the risk of bronchitis, emphysema and other lower respiratory disorders.

What’s more, it has been shown in animal studies, that maternal periodontal infections stymie fetal growth. This impaired growth is believed to be due to the enhanced release of inflammatory markers,

which also appear to instigate preterm delivery in humans.

A bridge to better health

With the link between oral health and general health impressively clear, the value of maintaining healthy teeth and gums becomes much more than an option. It is an imperative.

While the significance of brushing, flossing, and regular dental visits is evident, here are a few more tricks you might consider:

- Eliminate the sugar, white flour, trans fats and other junk food from your diet. It's never too late!
- As a substitute for sugar in coffee, tea and baking, try xylitol. It tastes like sugar, cooks like sugar, but in major studies has exhibited an *antibacterial* effect in the mouth.

What's more, it won't raise your blood glucose level like traditional cane sugar.

- Get acquainted with propolis. Propolis is the waxy substance that bees produce to protect their hives from infection. Some brands of toothpaste, like Tom's of Maine, offer a propolis-based formulation as an alternative to traditional formulas. You can also purchase a propolis tincture in the health food store, put a few drops in water and swish away.
- Maintain an adequate intake of vitamin C. Like scurvy-ridden sailors discovered centuries ago, inadequate C over time will result in ghastly gums. If you don't consume citrus fruits regularly, consider taking 100-500 mg. of extra

Vitamin C a day to avoid this fate. Buffered tablets are readily available for those with tender tummies.

The critical takeaway is this: your eyes may be a window to the soul, but your mouth is a window to your health. By keeping your teeth and gums healthy, you're upping your chances for a healthier you, inside and out.

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