

### A Smile on Every Face

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We all have multiple roles in life. I am no exception. I am a dentist, and a mother.

My child had begun school last year. As per the customs in most schools, parents are invited to address the children from time to time. During the informal interaction, they would be expected to talk about their respective profession, or narrate a folktale or demonstrate a skill — in fact, just about anything.

I said, “I would be delighted to talk to the young audience, but would like a few parents to attend the session as well.”

Since years, I have been associated with the health check-up camps being put up in the government schools. In my experience, during such mandatory camps organised by the schools, many children seem uncomfortable with the idea of having their teeth and gums examined. Some even refuse to open their mouth. Though the teachers are highly

supportive, it becomes a little difficult to make the young ones understand. I remember, one of the parent who was there, while the health check-up camp was in progress, glanced and said “After all they are milk teeth. They will drop-off anyway. What is the point of caring for them?” It was this remark, which made me realise the importance of educating not only the children, but their parents and guardians as well.

So, during my session, I addressed the parents first, with an intention to emphasise the importance of taking care of one’s teeth and gums, and dispel certain myths that people generally seem to have. I began by saying that a baby is born with eyes, limbs and bones, but the teeth come later. It should be practiced, that when a baby finishes having milk, a teaspoonful of water must be given to her. This helps in rinsing the mouth well, as the baby swallows. The day a baby’s first tooth appears, it should

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be cleaned by the parent, by passing a clean finger over it. A soft clean towel cloth can also be used.

After a quick interaction with the parents, I spoke to the children. When your goal is to educate the young audience, you have to derive an easy way to put across your words. Children are more perceptive than we give them credit for. So, I decided to use the simile of a 'bath'. I encouraged them to talk of bath time, splashing water, using soap, making bubbles, wearing clean clothes. Ah! Feeling fresh! With this example they could understand the concept of giving their teeth a 'bath'. Toothpaste being the 'soap' for the teeth. Just as they wash their hands after every meal to remove food particles, oil and smell, similarly their teeth have to be 'washed' through rinsing and gargling. Everyone loves to wear clean clothes; likewise every tooth likes to feel clean and fresh. The best way to check if your teeth is clean, I said, "is by running your clean finger back and forth after you finish brushing them. The cheenk-cheenk sound produced, means that your teeth are clean."

The children were delighted. They left with smiles on their faces. And so did the parents!

The simile of bathing that I used is an extremely familiar one. Bathing is something that children enjoy, so they could easily understand it. Teachers can use this simile, and of course more such examples, to focus on dental health.

It's important for the parents to be aware of their child's oral hygiene habits and try to inculcate best practices early in their lives. Once a child develops the habit of keeping proper oral care, they will definitely be much less susceptible to various mouth infections and tooth caries. Babies are born with all their teeth — we can't see them because they are hidden in the gums. Usually a baby teeth start to break through the gums around six months of age, but it is important to start good oral care for infants even before the first tooth comes out. Ultimately, from healthy gums come healthy teeth.

Kids have all their baby teeth, also called primary teeth, by the age of three. Baby teeth start falling out around the age six; that's when the permanent, or adult teeth start coming in. Gaps between baby teeth are considered normal as they make room for the permanent teeth. Most permanent teeth come in by age thirteen.

Dentists play an integral role in preventing oral health problems. They are active members of the preventive educational programme and serve as counselor to families regarding the importance of regular dental care, oral hygiene, and dietary management. Dentists should encourage good oral hygiene and teach correct brushing technique to both children and their parents. Restriction of carcinogenic food is important to prevent dental caries, for both children and adults. Though

it should not be communicated in such a way, especially to the children, that the child interprets withholding of sweets as punishment.

Oral hygiene is the practice of keeping one's mouth clean and free of diseases and other problems (e.g., bad breath) by regular brushing of the teeth, cleaning between the teeth (dental hygiene) and cleaning tongue. Oral hygiene though, a very inexpensive form of the preventive health measure, surprisingly, remains the most neglected one.

A tender twig of the *neem* tree can also, used to brush and clean the teeth. Medicinal plants like *tulsi* and *amla* (Indian gooseberry) continue

to be used today with encouraging results for good oral hygiene.

With a vision 'To reduce morbidity from oral diseases by strengthening existing healthcare delivery system and ensure access to affordable, quality, patient centred care' (<http://edantseva.gov.in/content/mission-vision#>), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, on October 7, 2019, launched the e-DANTSEVA website and mobile application. It is an initiative under the National Oral Health Programme (NOHP). The digital platform, 'e-DANTSEVA', contains information about the NOHP, a detailed list of all the dental facilities and colleges; Information,

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE**  
NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH PROGRAMME

**DENTAL CARE!**  
Word search

a	e	n	a	m	e	l	b	s	c	d	e
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s	t	o	o	t	h	p	a	s	t	e	b
h	e	f	l	u	o	r	i	d	e	l	

Braces	Fluoride	Toothpaste	Toothbrush	Scaling
Dentist	Filling	Enamel	Dentin	Pulp
Decay	Tartar	Gums	Tooth	

**ORAL HEALTH TIPS**

- Brush your teeth in the morning and night for 2 minutes
- Rinse your mouth after each meal
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables for a beautiful smile
- Don't hesitate to visit your dentist. He is your friend

(Image: An exercise from the 'Training manual on oral health promotion for school teachers', available at the e-DANTSEVA website)

Education and Communication (IEC) materials, including educational posters, videos, badges; step by step techniques for properly brushing and flossing teeth, etc. Training manuals for school teachers are also available with cute cartoon images, bright colours and fun exercises to engage children, and help in learning about the oral hygiene simultaneously.

The readers are advised to visit the website <http://edantseva.gov.in/> for more information.

Lastly, do remind your child and students to brush their teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste for full two minutes. It not only helps fight cavities and strengthen teeth, but also gives older kids the confidence of having fresh breath!

### REFERENCES

<https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=193659> as retrieved on February 4, 2021.