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Taking Care of Teeth

Sometimes the healthy way may not be the best way

Teeth – they are a pain getting them in the first place, and more so later in life. There is plenty of advice on the best way to care for teeth. Some of it is the professional kind; some should be basic commonsense; and then there is the home-grown variety plus a bit of new-age thinking that doesn't always do the trick.

In treating water for human consumption, many local Councils add chemicals before it is pumped out to the community. Chlorine seems to be necessary to kill germs, although sometimes the concentration is so strong that you can smell it as it comes out of the tap. There was even visible evidence of this when we had pets and used to leave out ice-cream containers of water for them. Over time, a tide-mark of residue stained the white inside a blue/green colour. We presumed this to be from the chlorine. Then again, it might have been a combination of that and fluoride which they also introduced into scheme water.

This was included because it was supposed to help strengthen teeth; and statistics over the years confirmed that tooth decay in the general populace was considerably reduced because of it. The fact that toothpaste also contained it was a bonus. So, brushing daily along with drinking plenty of tap water ought to keep everyone's teeth strong and healthy, yes? Unfortunately, lifestyle and personal opinions can make a real mess of good practice; and teeth.

Many people suffer from the Big Brother syndrome, arguing that they shouldn't have to be told what to do when they know perfectly well what's best for them. Neither should they be forced to ingest alien substances put in their drinking water when they never agreed to it in the first place. The way out for them is to drink only bottled water bought from the supermarket. If it is actual spring water it is bound to contain other elements like minerals from the soil through which it travels; there is, however, no guarantee that some brands aren't merely distilled water. Whatever. Presumably neither have been contaminated by those chemicals dumped in tap water, so they must be healthier, surely?

Let me tell you a story about our grandson. When he was very young, he lived with his family on a rural property. Not being connected to the scheme water, they had to rely on their rainwater tank. As an extra precaution, a state-of-the-art filter ensured that what came from the tank was as pure as it could be. After the young lad had cut his milk teeth; and to benefit his overall health, he wasn't allowed foods high in sugar; especially

not soda which is loaded with it. He drank mainly water and 100% orange juice with no added sugar. Occasionally he had plain milk; but not really enough because he wasn't keen on the taste. Everything was going fine until he began to develop tooth decay. This, the dentist claimed, was due to the lack of fluoride in the tank water, plus the excess acid in the OJ. It was a result of circumstances and good intentions; and it was a lesson learned that couldn't be ignored.

Milk teeth, of course, are eventually replaced as the new set grows through; which is when the serious problems start to crop up. Eating too much sweet food including cakes and candy; not to mention gallons of sodas, energy drinks and the like constantly attacks the teeth. Regular brushing helps, particularly last thing at night; but it has to be remembered that corrosive substances consumed during the day leave residue on and between the teeth until they are removed when convenient. That may be many hours; and all the time the protective enamel is constantly being eaten away. Once through that and it isn't long before another appointment with the dentist has to be made.

So, cleaning teeth is essential; and it is especially important for those people who have had braces fitted. Food lodges under the wires and has to be removed diligently. A quick brush isn't good enough. However long it takes is time well spent. Skimping could make the procedure pointless. Having to wear these uncomfortable appliances for extended periods to eventually straighten teeth so that they look and feel better; only to have them gradually rotting away doesn't seem all that smart. If the prospect is having them extracted and replaced by dentures; maybe putting in the extra time and effort while the originals are still healthy is a worthwhile exercise, after all.

One last thing. Brushing is essential; but there are right and wrong ways. Scrubbing too vigorously with a hard-bristled brush will eventually wear away the enamel. Often soft is better on both counts; and whether you need to brush up and down, or using a circular motion, simply ask your dentist. If he or she tells you what's best for you, take notice and you are less likely to be wearing false teeth one day; with a bit of luck perhaps never. Surely that would be something to make you smile...?

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