

The deciduous teeth resemble the permanent in shape, but are smaller and more rounded. The molars have a marked projection or ridge of enamel near the gum, which enables them to be easily distinguished from the permanent teeth. The roots resemble those of the permanent molars, but are smaller and more spread apart, to give room for the crowns of the developing bicuspid.

Deciduous teeth are of softer structure than the permanent, and thus caries is not uncommon, especially in weak and sickly children. Treatment should be both general and local. General treatment consists in attention to hygiene, nourishing food, plenty of fresh air, exercise and sleep, will help to build up the system, and so the teeth will become better able to resist the attack of caries.

Local treatment is, in nearly all cases, to remove the caries and fill. The operations should be performed quickly and with as little pain as possible.

The materials used are oxyphosphate of zinc, gutta percha, amalgam and tin. Gold is not used, as it takes too long to introduce, and too much force is required to condense it. Oxychloride of zinc is not used, on account of its irritating properties, the pulp being very liable to die under it.

Oxyphosphate of zinc is good for all the cavities in deciduous teeth, especially shallow proximal cavities in the front teeth. It also gives a good grinding surface in the molars. It must be watched, however, as it is apt to dissolve away slowly, especially near the cervical border of the tooth.

Gutta percha is, perhaps, the most useful material for preserving deciduous teeth, especially if the harder preparations are used. It is a non-conductor of heat, and is not irritating to the pulp. It makes a fairly desirable grinding surface in molars, and does not dissolve away in proximal cavities. Gutta percha will cohere to the walls better if the cavity is first coated with copal-ether varnish.

Amalgam is very good for cavities in the crowns of molars, as it can be introduced quickly and gives a good grinding surface. In deep cavities, however, where the pulp is living, oxyphosphate should first be used, amalgam being a good conductor of heat and cold, while oxyphosphate is not. Gutta percha would be preferable to oxyphosphate, as it is less irritating, were it not that it shrinks and expands, so that in time the amalgam covering becomes loose.

Tin is used by some as a filling in the crowns of deciduous molars. It does not conduct heat and cold so readily as amalgam, and it is claimed that owing to its plasticity it will make a tight filling even if moisture is present, but this is doubtful. The force and length of time required to condense it more than offset any of the advantages claimed for tin.