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## PRESERVATION OF THE TEETH.

Nothing is more common than a premature decay and loss of the teeth.—*Dr. Child.*

CARIES, or decay of the teeth, is common to all ages and temperaments, and is found in all conditions of society. The teeth become diseased, die, and drop away, while all other organs of the human system are in health and activity. The Creator doubtless intended that all the members of the same body should be equally durable; but, in consequence of the violation of certain laws of nature, we bring disease and premature death upon these organs. In most bones of the body, when caries takes place, the diseased parts being thrown off, and new bony matter deposited, a healthy action again commences. But it is not so with the teeth: when caries commences in them, its progress is more or less rapid, and their destruction is certain unless it is arrested by artificial means.

When the enamel (which is nature's fortification to protect the teeth against all external injuries) is broken, or worn away from a tooth, or is destroyed by some chemical agent, the bone of the tooth becomes exposed, and caries commences, which is almost universally external.—Therefore, any cause that has a tendency to break up, crack, or destroy the enamel, is the first thing to be avoided in the preservation of the teeth.

There are many causes of carious teeth, all of which may be avoided by every one, and the teeth be preserved in health and beauty even to advanced life.

*Hot drinks*, or hot food, coming suddenly in contact with the teeth, are liable to crack the enamel, by which the bony substance of the tooth is exposed; and the fluids of the mouth being admitted, and remaining there and stagnating, discoloration of the teeth, and consequent caries, ensue. Mr. Ribe says that "man is almost the only animal accustomed to hot food and drinks, and almost the only animal affected with carious teeth." Another man, equally shrewd, remarks that "the

Indians of North America knew nothing of carious teeth or debilitated stomachs till tea was introduced among them."

The extremes of heat and cold have a great influence in causing carious teeth. The enamel is exceedingly brittle, much resembling glass in its structure and properties, and is easily cracked when exposed to a sudden transition from heat to cold, and the reverse.

*Luxurious living* often causes an inflammatory diathesis in the system, deranges the general health, vitiates the secretions of the mouth, and carious teeth is the consequence. And this is one cause of the more rapid decay of the tooth at an early age now than in former times, when people indulged their appetites no farther than was necessary to sustain life.—when their aliments were what nature provided, perfectly simple and wholesome.

*Acids* of all kinds are injurious to the enamel of the teeth, as they readily unite with and destroy it. Even a natural tooth steeped in vinegar for a few hours loses its enamel, which crumbles into powder, leaving the bone entirely exposed. Care should be taken that medicines containing acids never come in contact with the teeth; if they do, the mouth should be immediately rinsed.

A *crowded condition* of the teeth in the mouth causes a wearing away of the enamel and induces decay, in which case it is necessary to have early attention and advice.

*Food lodged between the teeth* and in their depressions is another fruitful cause of decay,—as animal or vegetable food, when exposed to warmth and moisture, will soon generate an acid which corrodes the enamel; consequently, the teeth are very liable to begin to decay in parts exposed to pressure one upon another, and in parts most favorable to the lodgment of foreign substances.

*Mercury*, in all its preparations, when taken to salivate, (as calomel, corrosive sublimate, blue pill, and oxide of lithodeon,) causes an inflammation of the membranes about the teeth, giving rise to an acrid saliva, and is thus an indirect cause of caries. The same may be said of tartar of the teeth.

Acidity of the stomach, ill health, the contact of a decaying tooth and dead stumps with sound ones, diseased and ulcerated gums, and, above all, a filthy, un-

clean and unwholesome condition of the mouth, are fruitful causes of diseased teeth.

Some people's teeth are exceedingly frail, brittle and sensitive. This condition of the teeth may be owing to an imperfect organization, which may be hereditary; they contain more earthy and less gelatinous matter in their composition, and diseases are excited and aggravated in them by improper diet and total neglect, when they require more than ordinary care to preserve them in any tolerable state of health and soundness.

All tooth-powders containing gritty particles, even if very minute, are to be avoided. Charcoal is much in use for this purpose; and, were it not for the gritty particles found in it, would be valuable, both for its antiseptic and cleansing properties. That finely powdered charcoal contains particles of diamond is certain from the fact that, when it is rubbed between two pieces of glass, scratches will be found on their surfaces,—proving that it is unsuitable for the teeth. *Astringent* and *tonic* tooth-powders, as Peruvian bark, ulma, myrrh, &c., should not be used except in cases of tender and swollen gums, as they have a tendency to blacken the teeth if not perfectly removed after using.

The action of sugar on the teeth we shall consider at some length in another number of this paper. The smallness of our sheet precludes the possibility of our treating many subjects connected with the preservation of the teeth as we should be glad to do. We can only take up and consider briefly the leading ideas connected with the subject, and shall leave for future articles much valuable information and advice concerning the care, management and diseases of the teeth.

The subject of *tobacco* we shall also consider in a separate article. But we may briefly remark that the habit of smoking is liable to blacken the teeth, unless particular care is taken to rinse the mouth, or clean the teeth immediately after. Chewing tobacco may be useful in deadening the sensibility of the nerve of a decaying tooth, though this alone is not a sufficient reason for such an uncleanly and disagreeable habit, when so many other agents may be found to produce the same effect.

*Tartar* is a substance secreted from the saliva of the mouth, which is found by a magnifying power to be composed of