

THE TEETH

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DR. Osler expressed the belief that more physical degeneracy can be traced to the neglect of the teeth than to the abuse of alcohol. There is no doubt but that it effects more people. It is estimated that one-fifth of the teeth of our school children are diseased. Few people arrive at the age of twenty who have not had some dental trouble. Evidence is not lacking to show that even prehistoric man suffered from diseases of the teeth. Examination of thousands of school children in the United States and other countries show that from 75 to 90 per cent have dental and oral troubles.

No diseases are so wide spread as dental diseases, and perhaps none so affect the health of the entire body. They influence the health in the following ways: By decreasing the power of mastication; by causing reflex nervous troubles; by forming pus—the direct absorption of which, or when taken into the stomach—produces toxic effects; by furnishing a breeding ground for the bacteria which cause acute infectious diseases.

Thorough mastication is prevented by the lessening of the chewing surface. Disease or loss of a tooth greatly impairs the efficiency of the one opposite. A few diseased teeth, therefore, deprives the individual of a large per cent of the chewing surface. Mastication stimulates the healthy development of the jaw of the child and tends to clean the teeth, therefore, if mastication is not thorough disease is more likely to follow. A child suffering from bad teeth may become nervous from direct irritation of the nervous system, or because proper nourishment of the body is prevented.

Toxemia, or poisoning from the swallowing and absorption of pus, is probably the most serious evil resulting from neglected teeth. A cavity in a tooth is often filled with decayed food and bacteria. An unclean mouth is an ideal medium for germ life, because of the moisture, warmth and nutritive material furnished. More than a hundred kinds of mouth bacteria have been segregated and classified, several of which are known to be injurious. The spread of such infectious diseases as diphtheria, tonsillitis, influenza, pneumonia and pulmonary tuberculosis among school children is without doubt greatly augmented by the too common unsanitary condition of their mouths. The constant absorption of millions of virulent bacteria may give rise to diseases of the intestines and glands.