



Tooth Talk

by Mary Ellen Volansky, RDH, MS

Taking Care of Yourself is Taking Care of Your Family

The phrase above comes from a Siletz poster. But it's not just a poster on a wall in the Siletz Clinic. It's a poster created by Siletz Tribal members.

The six women in the poster are Siletz Tribal members. I don't know them personally, but I have seen them, maybe at the administration building or dancing at the Nesika Illahee Pow-Wow. Each time I see the poster, I think about their message – Taking care of yourself is taking care of your family.

In dentistry, there is a common understanding that medical problems (heart, lungs, and diabetes) can be worse in people whose oral health is not ... well, healthy.

Skeptics have suggested other explanations. For instance, people who have less-severe symptoms probably always took better care of themselves. So naturally they would have less-severe medical problems. But this is not always the case. Research is demonstrating that good oral health brings better overall health.

Now back to the poster, to one face in particular, the baby's.

Babies stir our hearts. We care for them; they need us to care for them. We test the temperature of their food. We might eat their food to convince them it's worth eating. We make sure they get sleep and dry clothes. We give them hugs. These steps and many more demonstrate love for our children.

How does all this connect to the poster and the baby?

Babies are not born with the germ or bacteria that causes cavities. At or before the teeth erupt, the germ or a bacterium that causes tooth decay arrives in a baby's mouth. At about the age of 4 to 6 months, babies begin to get teeth. The combination can cause havoc with their teeth. Where does the cavity germ come from?

Research is demonstrating that the cavity germ lives and prospers in untreated cavities. Whose dental cavities? Everyone's untreated cavities. Of concern for babies are the cavities of parents and care providers. Researchers have checked the makeup of the germs in the parents' mouth with the germs in their babies. These researchers have proven the germs are the same.

What is the risk to the baby? That he/she will develop tooth decay at 1 or 2 years old. Tooth decay that can cause pain and loss of teeth, that can cause a hospital visit and cost about \$5,000 to \$7,000 to treat.

Parents with treated decay – fillings or crowns – transfer the same germ. Even parents without cavities transfer the germ. But they both transfer much less of those germs. When there is a smaller amount of this germ, the risk of decay is less for both parents and their baby. Prevention is the key for everyone.

Parents, please have your oral health checked. Have cavities or gum disease treated, visit your dental professionals regularly, and brush and floss daily. Stay away from sweets, especially sipping soda (diet or regular).

When eating snacks, check to see if they are sweetened with Xylitol or some other sugar substitute. Put fluoride on your teeth with toothpaste (pea-size amount) and over-the-counter mouth rinses (A.C.T. or Oral-B).

What to do for your baby? Bring them to a dental professional as soon as they have their first teeth – about age 6 months.

We will do a knee-to-knee examination. The baby lies in your lap with his/her head on the knees of the dental professional's. We will lift the baby's lip and check the teeth for white spots or brown spots.

We check home care. We give instructions and tools. We will apply fluoride varnish. This reduces the risk of tooth decay. It also stops the early signs of decay, known as white spots.

Some of you have received the First Birthday Packet from the tribe. In these packets are home care supplies – cloth and bristle brushes. These are tools for cleaning your infant's gums and teeth.

Use a popcorn kernel-size amount of toothpaste when you brush. As with adults, a little fluoride toothpaste goes a long way. Floss when the teeth touch. Rinse or clean your baby's mouth after a meal. Clean your baby's mouth before bed.

So with oral health, as with all health, "Taking Care of Yourself is Taking Care of Your Family."

Excerpted from the Oregon Early Childhood Cavities Prevention Coalition Meeting held Oct. 21, 2005.

Important Notice About Prescription Drug Coverage and Medicare American Indian Medicare Beneficiaries

Since you are a Medicare beneficiary receiving health care services and/or prescriptions at the Siletz Community Health Clinic or through Siletz Tribal Health, we want to provide you with information about the new Medicare Prescription Drug Plan (PDP) – also called Medicare, Part D – that starts Jan. 1, 2006.

First – Please read this notice carefully and keep it where you can find it. This notice has information about the current prescription drug coverage you receive from Siletz Tribal Health and the new Medicare prescription drug coverage that will become available Jan. 1, 2006. It also tells you where to find more information to help you make decisions about your prescription drug coverage.

Second – You will continue to get medications at the Siletz pharmacy at no cost to you whether or not you sign up. The Indian Health Service (IHS) has determined that the prescription drug coverage now offered by all IHS or tribal organizations, including Siletz Tribal Health, is "creditable coverage." Knowing that your current prescription coverage is "creditable coverage" is important. It protects you if you choose not to enroll in the Medicare PDP as soon as you are eligible.

(Remember: **Keep this notice.** If you enroll in one of the new Medicare PDPs after May 15, 2006, you may need a copy of this notice when you enroll to show that you are not required to pay a higher premium amount.)

Third: If you are on the Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) in addition to Medicare, you will receive a letter and will automatically be signed up. If you receive one of these letters, please call one of the people listed at the end of this article and she will help you make sure the program you are enrolled in meets your needs and the needs of the Siletz Tribal Health program.

Fourth: For everyone else, there may be some benefit to you to enroll if you use retail pharmacies a great deal, and there may be some benefit to Siletz Tribal Health if you are low-income and use a lot of medications. We really don't know the answers yet; we are learning right along with you.

We will make ourselves available to help you with questions. We encourage you to look at the information available at www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

You also can call one of us; we will offer one-on-one assistance to help answer your questions:

- Angela Ramirez, Elders Program Coordinator, 1-800-922-1399, ext. 1225, or 541-444-8225
- Rhonda Attridge, CHS Technician, 1-800-628-5720, ext. 1648, or 541-444-9648
- Beverly Baumgardt, Medical Support Supervisor, 1-800-648-0449, ext. 1635, or 541-444-9635

Flu Shots Now Available

Remember, there are three ways to get your flu shot (FluMist™ will not be available at the Siletz Clinic):

1. At your provider visit
2. Schedule a nurse visit
3. Walk in between 10 a.m.-11 a.m. or 2 p.m.-3 p.m. **only**

Find These Foods In The Word Puzzle

1. PIZZA
2. MELON
3. CELERY
4. YOGURT
5. CARROT
6. POPCORN
7. PRETZELS
8. STRAWBERRY
9. BANANA
10. ORANGES
11. APPLES



1992 American Dental Association, Dudley Collection

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