

# Varying Amounts of Fluoride Said Consumed In Daily Menu; Water Fluoridation Favored

By A. ROBERT SMITH  
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Washington — Millions of Americans have been drinking fluoridated water for many years, starting long before medical research discovered that fluoridation in the proper degree greatly reduces tooth decay.

And virtually every American consumes varying quantities of fluoride every day at the dinner table in the foods he eats, whether it be a meal of hotdogs or steak. In both cases, it is part of the natural order, for fluoride is a vital element in man's daily diet.

These observations are made by top officials of the U. S. Public Health Service when asked for their views on the controversial question of adding fluoride to drinking water to cut down dental diseases. Their point is that virtually everyone today has quantities of fluoride in his diet, and that controlling the quantity of fluoride in drinking water does not introduce any new element into the average person's digestive system.

**Fluoridation Favored**  
The Public Health Service strongly favors fluoridation of water, for the results it has found over the past decade of testing and research are expressed concisely by Dr. Thomas L. Hagan, chief of its division of dental public health:

"Extensive scientific evidence has proved that water fluoridation is effective in reducing tooth decay and causes no bad effects on health. Tests of legality have demonstrated that the procedure is not an infringement of individual liberty. Furthermore, water fluoridation is the most economic decay preventive available today."

A survey by the Health Service shows that about 1200 communities in the U. S. have drinking water that is naturally endowed with just about the right amount of fluoride to arrest tooth decay. Nature is taking care of some 4,000,000 people here.

Then there are about 60,000,000 people in many other communities whose drinking water has some natural fluoride but less than the recommended amount.

In the past decade, about 1,000 communities have adopted controlled fluoridation of their municipal water supply, adding millions more to the total population now obtaining fluoridated water.

In some of these cities which have added fluoride, tests have been run to determine the effect on dental disease. In Grand Rapids, Mich., results showed that before fluoridation the average 16-year-old child had 14 teeth either decayed, filled or extracted; but after fluoridation had been in effect nine years, tooth disease declined in children of all ages, and the average 16-year-old had 10 teeth which had required dental attention.

The Public Health Service is interested in fluoridation because it believes that probably no other disease affects so large a proportion of the U. S. public as does dental disease. Its officials recall that 21 per cent of the boys rejected from military service during World War II were turned down because of bad teeth.

"In 1953 the American people spent about \$1,600,000,000 for

dental care, or about one-sixth of the total expenditure for personal health services in the nation," explained Dr. John W. Knutson, chief dental officer of the Public Health Service.

"This sum, an all-time high in dental expenditures, is but a fraction of the estimated amount needed to provide adequate care for the American people," he said. "Even if there were an unlimited amount of money available for dental care, there are simply not enough dentists to furnish the required volume of services. Thus, there is little possibility that the nation's dental health problem can be solved in the near future solely by increasing the correction of existing defects."

Dr. Knutson said the Health Service, charged by Congress with responsibility for research into health problems, has covered the field in trying to lick den-

tal troubles—even to experimenting with dental assistants for dentists who have multiple chairs which "has enabled dentists to increase their productivity and to treat more people."

**Works With Local Groups**  
The Health Service also does research on diseases of the gums and bones, and it works with state and local health agencies to encourage periodic dental examinations, to apply proper methods of dental care and to promote desirable dietary habits.

Fluoridation, then, is just one part of a diversified and balanced approach to meeting our total dental health needs," said Dr. Knutson. "It has met all the tests. It was studied over a long period of time, both by research workers in the Public Health Service and by other investigators. It was subjected to intensive field testing for safety and practicability. Its effects were

demonstrated, checked and rechecked. Practical methods for its application were worked out and perfected in considerable detail. And it finally became part of the public health armamentarium, along with other preventive techniques."

Such as the Health Service favors fluoridation of drinking water, it does not try to dictate what any community should do when this question is raised.

**Decision Up to People**  
"As with all public health procedures," explained Dr. Knutson, "the decision on fluoridation rests and, in our opinion, should continue to rest with the local community. If public health work, it could not be otherwise, nor would we wish it to be otherwise. We believe there is no justification for any federal intervention into local health matters. We feel certain that in fluoridation as in other health matters,

the combination of professional health leadership and enlightened citizen interest will insure the decision that will enable communities to go forward in health.

"We cannot accept the premise that fluoridation of public water supplies constitutes a hazard to public health. On the contrary, we believe that its safety has

been clearly established and that its potential for improving dental health warrants the serious consideration of all communities concerned with progressive health measures.

"We believe, however," concluded the government's chief dental officer, "that the determination should be left for each community to decide for itself."

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