

Baby Teeth Are Important, OSC Scientist Notes

Corvallis—The feeling that baby teeth are "unimportant because they will drop out eventually anyway" is completely wrong and can lead to dental complications when children get older, an Oregon State college dental scientist points out.

Children need all their teeth for chewing and to maintain the proper space for the permanent teeth developing underneath. Dr. Gertrude Tank noted. It is important that children's teeth be taken care of in the early years and that children are taught the fundamentals of dental health, she added.

It is estimated that only about 10 per cent of the children in the U.S. receive adequate dental treatment. Dr. Tank reported. Two recent research projects conducted by her showed that 99 per cent of the children in the fluoride-free areas of six western states, including Oregon, have cavities. The average 14, 15 and 16-year-old in these states has 12 decayed, missing and filled teeth.

Parents Should Help
Parents should help their children acquire a "sane and sensible" attitude regarding dentists rather than one of "fear and dread," Dr. Tank emphasized. Regular check-ups can avoid serious dental problems and save pain, money and looks. Good teeth in later years are the result of good care in the early years, she said.

Dr. Tank has been doing dental research at OSC's school of home economics since 1953. Before that, she was a children's dentist in Philadelphia for 27 years.

Her research has centered around the role of other minor elements than fluoride in dental health. Past studies have shown that fluoride in community water supplies reduces tooth decay in teenagers as much as 55 per cent.

Dr. Tank advocates six basic rules to safeguard children's teeth: a well-balanced diet; restricted use of sweets, especially between meals; brushing teeth regularly after eating; early and frequent visits to the dentist (first visit about age 2); fluoridation of water supplies or fluoride treatments; prevention and correction of irregularities of teeth.

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