

Teeth for a Lifetime



*A leader in American dentistry
presents a startling
report on the great
strides in dental health*



by DR. PERCY T. PHILLIPS
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as told to LESTER DAVID

THE AMERICAN Dental Association recently celebrated its 100th anniversary. As its second century begins, dentists of this country can proudly predict two things:

Children now being born should be able to keep their teeth for a lifetime, and adults, exercising proper care, can do nearly as well.

For years the dental profession has had specific targets which would assure Americans this prospect of greater health. Recently our targets have been realized. Here are a few:

TARGET: Wipe out periodontal disease, the main villain in adult tooth loss.

PROGRESS: Not only can this condition, mistakenly called pyorrhea, frequently be cured, it now can be prevented.

The condition makes gums swell, then shrink and pull away from the necks of the teeth. Pus pockets form and infection eats into bones supporting the teeth. Sometimes the teeth become so loose, a finger can pluck them out.

We don't know what causes it. But because we can recognize the early signs of periodontal disease, we can now stop it before it takes hold. Dentists are alert for telltale signs—tartar forming where the gums meet the teeth, worn-out fillings, sharp edges of broken teeth, ill-fitting partial dentures, poor bite, persistent wedging of food between the teeth. When such warnings are spotted, preventive measures can be taken.

Even if periodontal disease gets a start, techniques have been developed for treatment. Diseased gum tissue often can be removed surgically. In certain cases, splints and other appliances can be constructed to restore gum strength and help tighten teeth. The dentist may even give some psychological advice—relax! Often the disease is caused by tension-ridden tooth grinders!

TARGET: Make tooth decay a thing of the past.

PROGRESS: Some dentists now in practice "may witness dental caries (decay) joining typhoid, smallpox, and other preventable diseases which have been conquered by man."

That statement by Dr. Willard C. Fleming, dean of the University of California school of dentistry, is based on several achievements. Use of water fluoridation by many communities, for example, has reduced decay by as much as 60 percent among children, and now scientists are tracking down substances which may act directly to prevent decay.

Their research shows that certain oral bacteria convert sugars to acids which cause cavities. Some chemicals can either kill the bacteria or stop them from making acid. Many experts claim they will be in common use within 10 years.

Nor is this all. Dr. Leroy E. Burney, U. S. Surgeon General, reports that the addition of certain mineral phosphates to children's diets may cause "significant reduction" in dental decay. He adds, "An effective dietary control of decay may now be in the making to supplement and extend the protection already available through fluorides and through good dental care."

TARGET: Better fillings and other dental materials.

PROGRESS: New and longer-lasting restorative materials are being developed every year.

Crowns and bridges, as well as fillings, are being constructed of materials of far greater durability. We even have experimented with constructing dentures which will be held to the jaws firmly with tiny cobalt-nickel magnets, the most powerful of their size ever developed.

TARGET: Save abscessed teeth and improve root-canal work.

PROGRESS: An abscessed tooth no longer means extraction in every case, and failures in root-canal work have been minimized.

Antibiotics are the keys in both cases. They have helped dentists salvage many "impossible" abscesses and also have given better odds in saving a tooth which is impossible to fill without removing the nerve and pulp, then filling the hollow root canal and closing it permanently. Formerly, bacteria might also be sealed in, causing abscess and infection. Now antibiotic treatment, plus new medication and techniques, makes this much rarer.

TARGET: Take the discomfort out of drilling.

PROGRESS: Much of today's fear is psychological, merely a hang-over from less efficient days.

The new high-speed tooth-cutting instruments have eliminated much nerve-jangling noise and vibration. They work so fast the patient is in the chair less time and experiences less actual discomfort. They provide excellent results, and patients feel virtually nothing.

TARGET: Get Americans to take better care of their teeth.

PROGRESS: Well, you'll have to answer that one individually.

Dentists need your help in achieving their ultimate goal for you—"teeth for a lifetime." Eat liberal amounts of food rich in vitamins, minerals, and proteins. Daily diets should include milk and its products; meat, fish, or poultry; eggs, butter, or fortified margarine; vegetables and fruits; and bread and cereal.

Brush your teeth immediately after eating and before retiring, each area several strokes, the lower teeth up and the upper teeth down. Don't forget the inner surfaces and biting areas.

With your help, dentists can assure you that the future health of your teeth never looked brighter!

COVER:

As Christmas morn approaches, greetings pour in from old friends and mysterious packages arrive by the score, giving the mantelpiece a festive air, as in Homer Hill's cover painting.

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