

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHY IS THE CARE OF THE TEETH IMPORTANT?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Edith A. Sorrie, City Hospital, Leeds.

PRIZE PAPER.

The chief office of the teeth is the "mastication of the food," and as this is the first and most important step towards good digestion, it follows that it is most important to devote great care and attention to the teeth all through life, so as to enable them to perform thoroughly their important function.

The teeth are hard, bone-like structures implanted in the sockets along the maxillary bones of the skull. Each consists of a crown, or the part showing above the gum, and the root imbedded in the jawbone. The main body of a tooth is composed chiefly of a hard substance called dentine. The body contains a pulp cavity, and this is filled with a pulpy substance containing nerve fibres (given off from the "trifacial nerve") and blood vessels. These enter the substance from the tip of the fang.

The crown is covered with a layer of extremely hard material called "enamel," which contains a higher percentage of mineral matter than bone. For this reason the enamel rarely or never decays, but when it gets chipped off, decay at once commences, and chiefly attacks the softer dentine or pulpy substance.

The decay is chiefly dependent upon external influences, but may be modified by constitutional conditions.

The predisposing causes to decay are:—

- (a) Imperfect structure, from whatever cause.
- (b) Mechanical injuries, such as falls, blows, improper use of the toothbrush (the movements of which should be up and down, not across). These aid in destroying the continuity of the enamel, thereby predisposing to decay.

Regular attention to the teeth from their first appearance will save a child much suffering, and at the same time will train him to realize the importance of the care of his teeth. In some cases, in spite of all the care given them, the temporary teeth show signs of decay; then especial care should be taken to prevent its extension. It is advisable to have a dentist examine the mouth of a child periodically after it is two and a half years old. The premature loss of the temporary teeth is sometimes deplorable, but there are cases when a dentist extracts one or more with a view to securing a regular alignment of the permanent set. The exciting causes of decay are chiefly "different forms of action" which may follow the use of acids as

food or medicine, or be caused by use of improper tooth powders or washes, or the presence of tartar about the necks of the teeth, causing an irritation of the gums and inducing an acid secretion, or from the fermentation of food between the teeth.

The last-named is the chief cause of caries. Derangements of the alimentary tract are generally accompanied by acidity of the saliva—hence the importance of aiding digestion as much as possible. The use of antacid washes and powders for the teeth are advisable.

Sugar and confections have no directly injurious effect upon the teeth, but when taken in excess produce an acid condition of the stomach, unfavourable to the health of the mouth, and, when left in the interstices of the teeth, rapidly undergo an acid formation, resulting in a product capable of acting very injuriously upon tooth structure.

From the foregoing instances of causes of decay, it is advisable to attend to the teeth after each meal, and always before retiring, so that particles of food may be removed from the teeth, thus preventing chemical decomposition, when naturally injurious gases would be swallowed, which would be detrimental to the alimentary tract.

Sometimes, in spite of the care taken of the teeth, caries takes place, when there are many probable results or dangers. If a tooth is decayed, the cold air quickly gains access to the pulp cavity, causing inflammation of the substance, which is known as toothache.

The nerve fibres may become inflamed, when facial neuralgia is the result.

The teeth being implanted in the bones of the skull, have been known to serve as a path for micro-organisms attacking the meninges, with the result that meningitis may occur.

Decomposition is constantly going on when a tooth is decayed, and since the tongue is always rubbing against the teeth, a person may develop cancer of the tongue.

Pyorrhœa, commonly known as Rigg's disease, is common to those who neglect the care of their teeth, and is the cause of many kinds of gastric and other serious diseases.

Since there are so many dangers which may arise from caries of the teeth, all efforts should be made to remove the causes, constitutional or local. Then treatment should be carried out to arrest the destructive action and to repair the damage in the manner best calculated to preserve the tooth or teeth in a serviceable condition, and to protect them against a recurrence or continuance of the decay. Sometimes it becomes essential to have a tooth extracted,

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