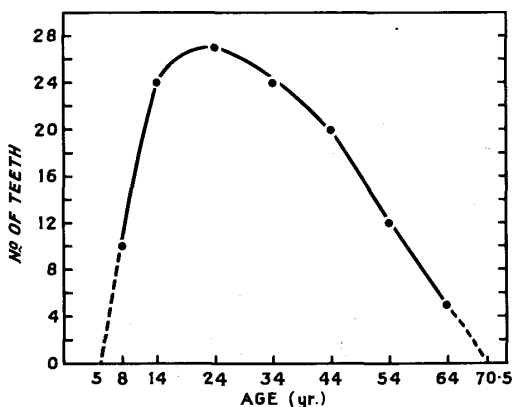


AGEING BY THE TEETH

SIR,—There are many publications suggesting that the oral cavity is a barometer of general health. Unfortunately, most of the reports are highly qualitative. We here report a highly quantitative observation in support of this thesis.

The age was recorded and the number of permanent teeth measured of 2116 presumably healthy persons. The accompanying figure shows that the number of teeth rises to a mean



Relation of age to tooth-loss.

Continuous line = data, interrupted lines = extrapolations.

of twenty-seven at age 24, and progressively declines to five at age 64. A projection backward to zero teeth crosses the horizontal axis at 5 years of age. This is consistent with the initial eruption of the permanent teeth into the oral cavity. If one may assume that total edentulousness represents oral death, and that oral and bodily death should be related, then projecting the line with advancing age shows that the point at which all subjects are expected to be without teeth is about 70.5 years. The highest estimated expectation of life at birth ever recorded in the United States—70.5 years for the total population—was attained in 1967, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.¹

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1. *Modern Med.* 1968, 36, 42.