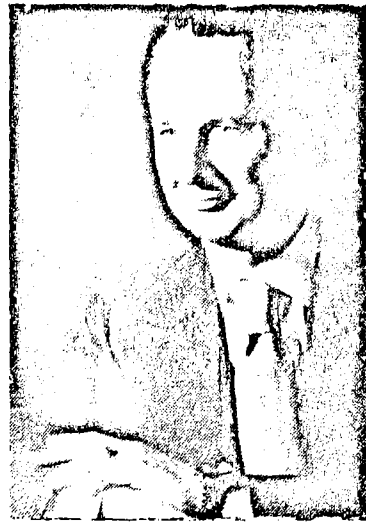


nutritionally speaking

Nursery bottle tooth decay



by Dr. George E. Meinig

Dear Dr. Meinig: My four year old son's baby teeth are full of cavities even though he hardly ever gets anything with sugar in it. I nursed him for two years, but he did have bottles of apple and grape juice almost every day while at the babysitter. Our dentist tells me that's probably why he already has so many cavities. What do you think?

N.H.

Dear N.H.: Your dentist is correct. The high amount of sugar, even though natural, can be very detrimental. Almost everyone believes natural foods will do no harm. Excesses of good foods, however, can be as devastating as deficiencies.

It takes two to three oranges to make a glass or orange juice. Not many adults can stomach 3 oranges all at once. Still this is consumed daily not only by adults but children as well. I don't know how many apples or grapes it takes to make a bottle of juice, but it is considerably more than one would eat.

The Agricultural Handbook Composition of Foods lists 3½ ounces of apple juice as containing 11.9 grams of carbohydrate. Sugar and starch are the main constituents of carbohydrate. This amounts to 3 teaspoonsful in a 3½ ounce bottle. Grape juice is much higher containing 4¼ teaspoons of carbohydrate, and if the sweetened kind is used, it adds up to 6 teaspoonsful.

INCIDENTALLY, the same problem can happen with milk. Children who are given a bottle of milk and allowed to go to sleep with it in their mouth, bathe the teeth with the liquid for several hours at a stretch. The sugar in milk is sufficient to decay severely all the teeth of a one to two year old. When a child has had enough,

the bottle should not be left as a pacifier but should be removed.

Recently the press carried stories to the effect that breast feeding caused decay of children's teeth. Children who nurse after 9 to 12 months in most instances also use some other nourishment and it is usually the new foods that are the culprit.

It is felt that the stagnation of milk in the mouth and around the teeth when the baby drops off to sleep causes the problem. Unrestricted breast feeding by a child sleeping in the bed with its mother, nurses at will during the night, the mother's breast is both nourisher and pacifier. Detailed studies have not shown that a major difference exists in what happens in the mouths of bottle and breast fed infants.

When sucking on the breast, the nipple is drawn deep inside the infant's mouth coming to rest at the junction of the hard and soft palate. The rhythmic action of the lower jaw and gums pressing from front to back against the breast tissue upward into the palate deposits the milk back on the soft palate, just in front of the throat opening. When the child ceases sucking, the nipple and breast immediately contract and withdraw in a shortening, thickening motion.

BOTTLE FEEDING infants often do not draw the nipple as far into the mouth nor does it fill it as does the breast so that the child must accumulate a greater amount of milk before the swallow reflex takes place. This allows pooling of milk in the mouth that does not occur in the breast fed. A child on the bottle who falls asleep often does so with enough milk in his mouth to bathe the teeth but not enough for him to swallow.

The milk coating the teeth in the warm mouth soon sours, increasing its acidity tenfold. The lactobacillus bacteria in the mouth act upon the milk sugar producing lactic acid which in turn starts the eating away of the teeth.

Physicians are often not aware that the child is using feeding as a pacifier to lull him to sleep and that such action can be very destructive to the primary teeth. Inasmuch as most of the 20 baby teeth must serve the child's chewing needs until the permanent ones come in between the ages of 6 to 12 years, their early loss is quite a handicap. If you think cavities have developed.....no matter what your child's age, it is important that you consult your dentist as to the care he would recommend to solve the problem.

Instead of milk, fruit juices and other sweetened concoctions, use plain water. Chicken leg bones and whole carrots make good pacifiers and the way infants vigorously chew on them is helpful in teething. Most I have seen relish natural teethers and they do get some food value from such items.

Dear Dr. Meinig: I seem to get conjunctivitis every once in a while. My eyes get crusty and stick together. Is there something I can do to help overcome this problem?

O.W.

Dear O.W.: This infection of the eyes has a number of different causes. It is commonly called "pink eye." Sometimes it is a complication of other body infections. It is usually caused by bacteria, and a number of different ones can be involved. But it can also result from allergy to foods or organisms.

The scientific journal, Ophthalmologica, reported that vitamin B6 used in conjunction with treatment of conjunctivitis helped by increasing the amount of tear flow. Another investigator also found a significant improvement in the production of tears when using B6 in 500 mg doses.

This does not imply that other treatment is not used. As "pink eye" is often contagious, it is wise to have medical care in order that the cause of the problem be determined and proper treatment recommended. Recovery should be enhanced not only by B6 but a good multiple vitamin along with ascorbic acid is indicated.

Everyone has a question about eye infections. Send yours

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