Take Care of Yourself

TAKE TIME FOR YOUR TEETH

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Have you ever thought about how much you need your teeth? Very often we take our teeth for granted ... until one of them starts to hurt.

It is important to take good care of teeth because they are needed for:

- **Eating.** Different teeth have special jobs to do when you eat. The front teeth are shaped especially for biting. The back teeth are used for grinding food.

- **Talking.** It is very difficult to talk clearly without teeth or with missing teeth.

- **Appearance.** Strong and healthy teeth are an important part of a pleasing smile.

PLAQUE—THE ENEMY

Plaque (rhymes with sack) is a sticky layer of germs that forms on the teeth. By cleaning your teeth every day, you can remove plaque before it harms your teeth.
But... if the plaque is not removed, it will get very hard and cling to the teeth. This hard substance is called tartar. When tartar forms, the germs are stuck tightly to the tooth and the tooth can start to decay. The result is a cavity.

It is important to clean the teeth very carefully every day. With clean teeth, plaque will not have a chance to cause a cavity.

CLEANING TEETH

Floss your teeth. Use dental floss to clean between your teeth, especially along the gum line. Your toothbrush cannot reach these areas.

Brush your teeth. Your dentist or someone in his office can show you the correct way to brush your teeth.
Choosing the right toothbrush is an important step to better dental health.

When buying a new toothbrush, examine it closely.

- **Bristles.** You do not need hard bristles to get your teeth clean. In fact, hard bristles can damage your gums. Most dentists recommend soft nylon bristles with rounded ends. Also look for a brush with a flat brushing surface.

- **Handle.** A straight handle is easier to move around the mouth than one that is angled.

- **Head.** The size of the head of the toothbrush will depend on the person who will use it—a small brush for young children and a larger brush for adults.
It is as important to have regular dental check-ups as it is to have regular medical check-ups. Dental check-ups will cost money, but they can save money in the long run because they help to prevent dental problems.

A child's first visit to the dentist should be at 2 to 3 years of age—when all the baby teeth have come in.

TO PROTECT YOUR TEETH:

- Brush and floss your teeth every day.
- Eat nutritious meals and cut down the amount of sugar that you eat.
- Visit the dentist regularly. The dentist can find problems early, before they become serious.
This information was prepared by Carla Shearer, Extension health education specialist.

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