



OUR TEETH

THE IDEA

Each person gets two sets of teeth. The second set are permanent teeth and must last for a whole lifetime. If we let them get rotten, or if our gums are diseased, we can suffer much pain and may lose our teeth. We can prevent tooth decay by eating healthy food and by taking less sugary food and drink. We should also clean our teeth carefully. This will prevent germs breeding and attacking our gums.

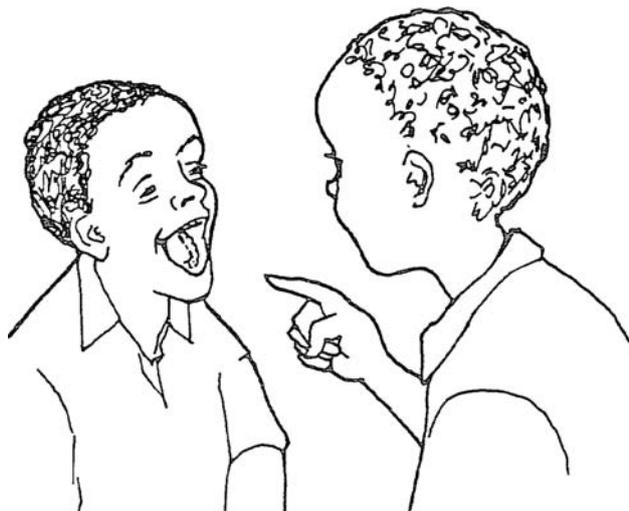
Why do we need teeth?

We need teeth for:

- biting and chewing our food.
- smiling and looking good: a person with shining whole teeth looks happy and attractive.

Having good healthy teeth allows people to eat a wide variety of foods. We have two different kinds of teeth because our teeth have two main tasks – biting and chewing. Our front teeth are for biting food and the back ones are for chewing it. Good teeth can give pleasure as we bite into foods.

Clean, strong and shining teeth make you look attractive and help you to speak clearly.



Children should understand that they get two sets of teeth in their life. The first set begins to fall out between the ages of five and eight years. The second set is their last set, and they will get no more! It is important to look after both sets very carefully.

Where and how these activities have been used

Despite the great importance of this topic, many health education programmes do not include oral hygiene. In fact, oral hygiene is not possible without some oral health education. Nonetheless, this Activity Sheet is important in nearly all Child-to-Child health programmes but a particular priority in urban areas in many countries. It is a very popular activity with children because of the many opportunities for fun provided by the topic. No child who has watched a tooth being eaten away in a glass of sweet fizzy drink will ever forget it!

In addition to the many health programmes which include units on teeth, there are certain programmes which have concentrated on dental health and used the Child-to-Child approach with great success. In Delhi (India), the 'smiling teeth' a preventive dental health programme began in 1987 to improve oral hygiene, health knowledge and the children's self-esteem. It has now spread to many schools. The Child-to-Child approach was used and the teachers involved were given special training to use this approach. They found it so effective that they began to use it with other subjects too. This has also increased their confidence and satisfaction.

What happens when teeth go rotten?

Some children's teeth decay. They get brown and develop black holes which look ugly. The holes are small at first, but if they are not filled by a dental worker, they turn into big holes which can hurt. These children often have bad breath, toothache, and may even have a boil or abscess in the gums surrounding the teeth. The teeth may be so rotten that they must be taken out. It then becomes difficult to bite or chew food.

What makes teeth go rotten?

Teeth go rotten when we eat too much sugar, sweet food and sweet fizzy drinks. Sugar in fruit does not rot teeth, but sweets, chocolate, cakes, biscuits, and fizzy drinks or sweet tea or coffee all contain sugar which does. Foods like these are particularly harmful to teeth when we eat them between meals as a snack.

What makes gums diseased?

The gums cover the jaw around the teeth. When teeth and gums are not cleaned properly, something called plaque forms around them. Germs live in the plaque and make our gums sore and unhealthy.

How can we help keep our teeth and gums healthy?

We need to keep our teeth clean and free from holes, and to keep our gums healthy. If our gums are infected, then our teeth can become loose and fall out.

We keep our teeth free from holes by eating healthy food and avoiding too much sugar. Remember, too, that for babies, mother's milk is best for building healthy teeth from the start.

Brushing makes our teeth look and feel clean. It removes food and keeps our mouths fresh, but brushing also helps to remove plaque which forms on our teeth. Plaque is a sticky film of bacteria (germs) which can cover our teeth if they are not clean. These germs cause disease in our

gums. Gum disease makes teeth bleed, and can cause us pain and weaken teeth so that they become loose. We therefore need to brush our teeth regularly with a brush or a brushstick to remove plaque and stop the germs from breeding.

**REMEMBER:
HEALTHY GUMS DO NOT BLEED.**

Fluoride

A chemical called fluoride in water strengthens the surface of teeth and helps to prevent them rotting. In many areas there is plenty of fluoride already in the water (though the amount can vary according to the time of year). In other places there is not enough, and if possible, we should brush our teeth with a toothpaste containing fluoride.

The health workers in your area will know whether your water has enough fluoride in it. Find out.

Activities

Children can observe

Children can look at the teeth of:

- their younger brothers and sisters
- older children
- babies
- children of the same age
- adults including older people.

Encourage them to look regularly at their teeth and other children's teeth.

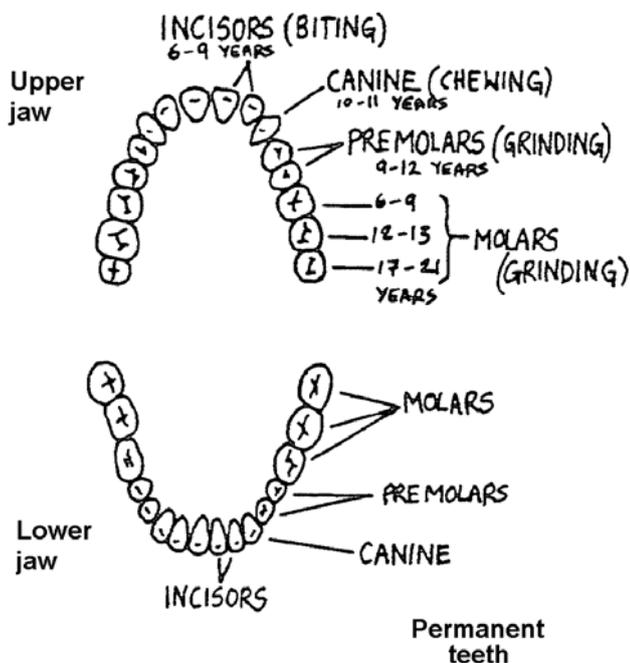
- Do all children have the same number of teeth?
- How many teeth do babies have when they are born? (They usually have none.)
- When do the first teeth usually appear in most babies? (They usually appear at about 3–4 months.)
- How many do they have when they are two years old? (Most children have about twenty 'milk' teeth when they are two.)

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.1

CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

- When do the first set of teeth start to fall out? (Permanent teeth begin to appear at about the age of six, and push out the milk teeth.)
- What is the greatest number of teeth in a mouth? (An adult has 32 permanent teeth.)

While the children are looking at teeth, do they notice that some teeth are black? Do they notice that some teeth have holes in them? Such teeth have decay. They are rotting. Have any holes been filled by the dental worker? What do they look like? What are they filled with? Have they talked to any older people who have lost many teeth?



Children can make surveys and keep records

- How often do I brush my teeth or use a chewing stick? How do I do it?

We can compare patterns across a class. (Remember that children may tell you that they have brushed more often than they really do because they know that is what you want to hear.)

- How often have I eaten sugary things at meal times and between meals?

Children may be able to change from eating sugary snacks to healthy snacks.

Score with an **X** every time you have either a safe snack or a sugary snack.

	safe snacks	sugary snacks
Day 1	X	X X X X
Day 2	X X X	X X X
Day 3	X X X	X X X
Day 4	X X X X	X X

- Who has lost a tooth? (Which kind of tooth? What was the child's age?) Who has been to the dentist and had a filling? Keep a class chart.

Children can experiment

Children get together in pairs or groups and colour their teeth with an ordinary household food dye. It can be applied with a clean cloth, or simply by putting several drops onto the tongue and wiping the tongue around the teeth.

Children then look into a mirror or into each others' mouths to see where the staining is heaviest. It will be heaviest where the plaque is heaviest. They can then try to remove the stain with brushes, chewing sticks or any other means.

- Which teeth are most difficult to reach?
- Which ways of cleaning work best?

Check each others' teeth and see.

Note: There is no 'best' method. Removing the plaque is all that matters. For some children one method will work best, for others a different one.

Children can discuss

At school, the observations of children can be discussed and recorded. Children should be able to say why teeth are important. Can they imagine what it is like to have no teeth? What problems has a person with no teeth?

Discuss the different kinds of teeth. Children can find the jobs of the different teeth (biting or chewing).

Children can bring teeth of different animals to school. Children can look for the skulls of dead animals. Are the teeth of animals different? How are they different? Why are they different? (Do the children understand that some animals, like dogs, eat meat, while other animals, like cows, eat grass? Sharp teeth are for biting and chewing. Short, flat teeth are for grinding and chewing.)

Which animals have sharp teeth? (Dogs and cats, mice and rats will have some very sharp teeth for biting things.) Which ones have more grinding teeth? (Cows, goats and sheep, which chew a lot of grass, have large flat molars for grinding up the food.)

Children can make up and illustrate stories

Here are a few ideas to start off the stories:

I don't care

The story of the child who thought caring for teeth was a waste of time.

"Your teeth look yellow and dirty."

"I don't care."

"Your gums are bleeding."

"I don't care."

Finish the story. What made the child begin to care?

The hare's revenge

(from the Child-to-Child reader **The Market Dentist**)

The hare makes a good living caring for the animals' teeth. He eats healthily, and doesn't like sweet things. But the hyena is out to catch him. He disguises himself and pretends to have a very bad tooth. The hare is just about to look into the hyena's mouth when he realises his mistake and snatches his hand away, one split second before the hyena closes his jaw. Hare resolves to take his revenge. The hyena has a large family and they are all very fond of sweets ...
(finish)

A tooth in trouble

The story of a strong and hard-working tooth, told by himself.

"All was well until all these sweet drinks came pouring in and began to rot me ... There was also a large colony of germs which wanted to camp on my surface ... " (finish)

All these stories can be illustrated.

Children can make and use a brushstick

Each child can make a brushstick, which looks like this:



- Use the twig of a tree; is there any tree used locally which is especially good for making brushsticks?
- Chew on one end of the twig and use the fibres as a brush.

Toothbrushes can be used if they are available. Practise using the stick or toothbrush. It must clean all the surfaces of the teeth, and the children should brush up and down and from side to side.

The children can bring their brushsticks or toothbrushes to school each day and brush their teeth together before class.

They can make a brushstick for a younger brother or sister at home, and teach them how to brush their teeth well.

Children can learn to make their own healthy snacks (Even sell them to other children)

List the snacks; decide who will collect and prepare them, and who will sell them. There are many alternatives which other children love and which do not contain sugar, e.g.

- Potatoes, yams, cassava, fried in oil (oil gives energy).

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.1

CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

- Roasted maize.
- Popcorn with salt.
- Nuts.
- Fruit.
- Vegetables such as carrots (which can be cut into shapes).

Work out the costs of your snacks compared to the cost of sweet drinks. Yours will be cheaper.

Children can make a play

The children can do a sketch or puppet play about their teeth. The characters could be as follows:

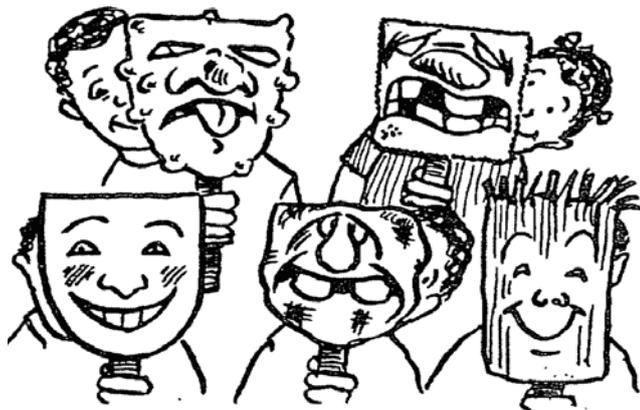
Jimmy Germ (the gum thief)

Simon Sugar (a rotter)

Sammy Molar (a good but rather stupid man)

Dan Dental Worker and Bella Brushstick (two good, helpful people who stop Jimmy Germ and Simon Sugar attacking Sammy Molar)

Fred the Farmer (who grows fresh food)



Here is an outline plot which can be developed by teachers and children.

- Sammy Molar tells Dan Dental Worker what it is like to be a tooth. He says how frightened he is of Jimmy Germ and Simon Sugar.
- Jimmy Germ and Simon Sugar appear and tell the audience how they plan to rot Simon Molar and make his gums so weak he will fall out.
- Dan Dental Worker and Bella Brushstick discuss how to stop them attacking Sammy Molar.

- Sammy Molar gets covered in sweet food by Simon Sugar. Sammy Molar starts to go bad. Jimmy Germ attacks his gums. Sammy cannot stand up well.
- Sammy Molar describes his problems to Dan Dental Worker who explains the importance of cleaning his teeth and not eating too much sweet food.
- Dan Dental Worker introduces Sammy to Fred the Farmer. He tells Sammy about foods that will not hurt him. Simon Sugar is very angry.
- Sammy then visits Bella Brushstick, who drives out Jimmy Germ.
- Simon and Jimmy quarrel and blame each other.

Children can make a checklist of good tooth care. They can make a list of do's and don'ts for looking after teeth and gums. This list might include the following:

DO

- **Brush teeth and gums every day.**
- **Eat healthy food.**
- **Teach younger brothers and sisters to brush their teeth.**
- **Have a brush or brushstick for each person in the family.**

and so on ...

DON'T

- **Forget to brush teeth.**
- **Drink too many sugary drinks.**
- **Eat many sweets or a lot of sugar.**
- **Use hard, sharp sticks, charcoal or other hard materials for cleaning teeth.**

and so on ...

Follow-up

The checklist suggested above will test how much the children understand about caring for their teeth. It is important to find out whether children's actions have changed. We need to know:

- If they have changed their ways of eating. Are they eating fewer sugary snacks? Watch them; ask them.
- Are they brushing their teeth more regularly? Ask them; ask their parents, or older brothers and sisters.
- Have they helped other younger children to look after their teeth better?

REMEMBER

Healthy Teeth are one part of a Healthy Child.

A healthy child needs to eat good food and practise good hygiene. Teaching and learning about healthy teeth can be a 'way in' to teaching and learning about many other aspects of good health.

USING THIS SHEET

The idea of strong, clean and healthy teeth can be introduced to children by a number of people:

- **dental workers** during a visit to a school.
- **teachers** at various levels of primary school – teeth are a good topic for work in health and/or science lessons.
- **Scout, Guide, community and health workers** in out-of-school groups.
- **a drama group** or **puppet theatre** in a short drama or puppet play.