

Your Own Teeth and Gums

Next time you look in a mirror, look at your teeth and the skin (gums) around them. Look in your children's mouths, too. Look at both gums and teeth, because the health of one often depends on the health of the other. **To be strong, teeth need healthy gums. Healthy gums need clean teeth.**

What can good teeth give you?

- GOOD HEALTH
- GOOD LOOKS
- GOOD SPEECH
- GOOD EATING
- GOOD BREATH



And when you think of your teeth, think of your gums. Gums are important for holding each tooth in place.

You need strong teeth to eat different kinds of foods. Different foods are important for health. Nuts, maize, fruits, and meat are some of the best foods—but they are difficult to bite and chew if your teeth are loose and hurting!

You can usually tell if your teeth and gums are healthy or not. Look at the pictures on pages 73 and 74 and compare them with your own mouth. If you find a problem in your mouth, look for its name in Chapter 6 and look for its treatment in Chapter 7.

Most important: when you are not sure of a problem or how to treat it, talk to an experienced dental worker.

If you notice a problem early, often you can stop it from getting worse. It is even better to prevent the problem from starting. You can do this if you know how to keep your teeth and gums healthy.



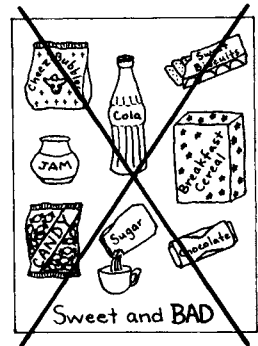
Learn to take care of your own teeth and gums before you try to teach others. A good example is one of your best teaching tools. People will see that you are healthy, and they will want to know why. When you tell people ways to care for their teeth, they will believe you if they know that you do these things yourself. First take care of your own teeth and gums. Then teach your family what you have learned. They, too, will be good examples for others to see.

EAT ONLY GOOD HEALTHY FOODS

The best food is food that you grow or raise yourself. Mix different kinds of food together and eat several times a day. This helps your body as well as your teeth and gums to stay strong and healthy. **Traditional food is usually good food.**

Sweet food, especially the kind you buy from the store, can mix with germs and make cavities—holes in the teeth. Soft food sticks to the teeth easily and it, too, can make a coating of germs and food on the teeth that starts an infection in the gums—gum disease.

Soft and sweet food and drinks with a lot of sugar are bad for both teeth and gums.



Breastfeed to help a child’s teeth grow and stay strong. An older child can drink from a cup.



YES
GOOD FOR TEETH

Do not give a baby anything to drink from a bottle. Sweet tea, sugar water or fruit juice can easily make holes in the child’s teeth.

**REMEMBER:
BREAST
IS
BEST!**

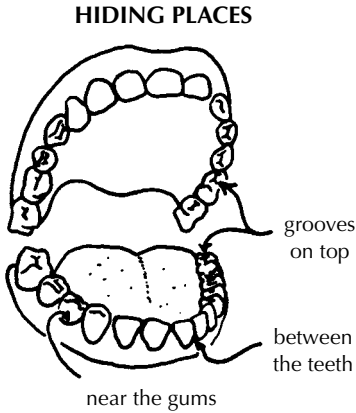


NO
BAD FOR TEETH

Even milk has sugar that can wash over the baby’s teeth and cause cavities when it comes from a bottle.

CLEAN YOUR TEETH EVERY DAY

If you do not clean properly, the food that is left on your teeth can hurt the teeth as well as the gums near them.



Here are 3 places where problems start.

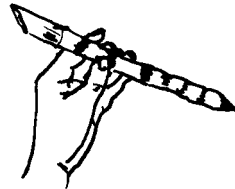
Bits of food stay longer in grooves and 'hiding places'. This is where both tooth and gum problems start.

To prevent problems you must take special care to keep these protected places clean.

It is better to clean your teeth carefully once every day than to clean poorly many times a day.

Use a **soft** brush to clean your teeth. Buy one from the store (be sure it says **soft** on the package), or make a brush yourself. To make a brush:

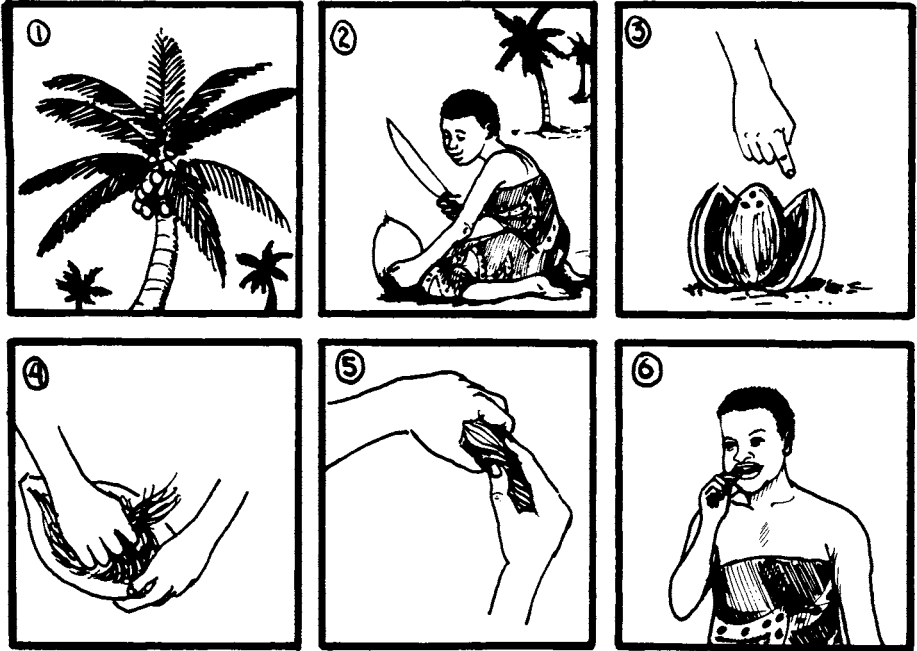
1. Use a small branch of young bamboo, strong grass, or the skin from sugar cane or betel nut.
2. Cut a piece that is still green and soft.



3. Chew one end to make it stringy like a brush.
4. Sharpen the other end so it can clean between the teeth (see pages 71-72).



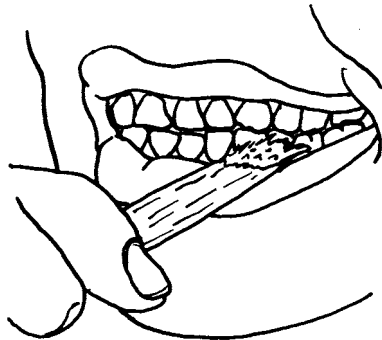
You can twist the fiber from inside a coconut husk into a kind of brush. First rub it and shake away the loose bits. Then use the end to clean your teeth.



Whatever kind of brush you use, be sure to clean your back teeth as well as your front teeth. Scrub the tops and sides where the grooves are. Then push the hairs between the teeth and scrub (page 69).

Toothpaste is not necessary.

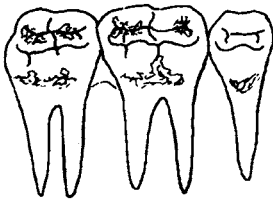
Charcoal or even just water is enough. When your teeth are clean, rinse away the loose pieces of food.



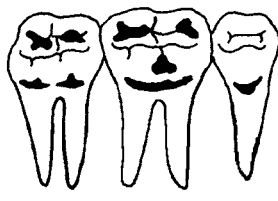
CAVITIES, TOOTHACHES AND ABSCESSSES

'Cavities' are holes in teeth. Cavities are made by the infection called **tooth decay**. If you have a black spot on your tooth, it might be a cavity. If that tooth hurts some of the time, such as when you eat, drink, or breathe cold air, it probably has a cavity in it.

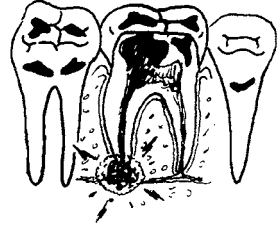
You will get cavities in your teeth if you eat sweet food and then do not clean your teeth. **If you see a cavity starting in your mouth or feel a tooth hurting you, get help right away.** If you do not fill a cavity, it grows bigger and deeper. A dental worker knows how to fill the cavity so you can keep that tooth. Do this before the pain gets worse.



Each tooth has roots that hold it in the jaw bone. Inside each root is a nerve (pages 41, 42, and 46).



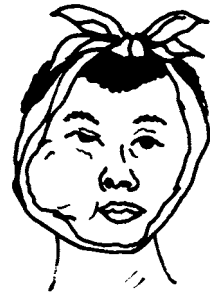
When decay touches the nerve, inside the tooth aches, even when you try to sleep.



When infection reaches the inside of a root, it is called a **tooth abscess**.

A tooth with an abscess needs treatment at once, before the infection can go into the bone (page 93). In most cases the tooth must be taken out. If it is not possible to do this right away, you can stop the problem from getting any worse if you follow these steps:

1. Wash the inside of your mouth with warm water. This removes any bits of food caught inside the cavity.
2. Take aspirin, paracetamol (acetaminophen), or ibuprofen for pain (pages 94–95).
3. Reduce the swelling:
 - hold warm water inside your mouth near the bad tooth.
 - Wet a cloth with hot water and hold it against your face. **Do not use water hot enough to burn yourself!**

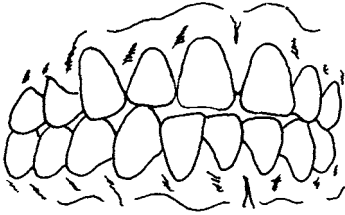


A tooth abscess can cause swelling like this.

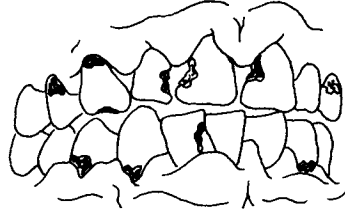
SORE BLEEDING GUMS

Healthy gums fit tightly around the teeth. Gums are **infected** if they are loose, sore, and red, and if they bleed when the teeth are cleaned. Infection in the gums is called **gum disease**.

Gum disease, like tooth decay, happens when acid touches the teeth and gums. This acid is made when sweet and soft foods mix with germs (see page 50).



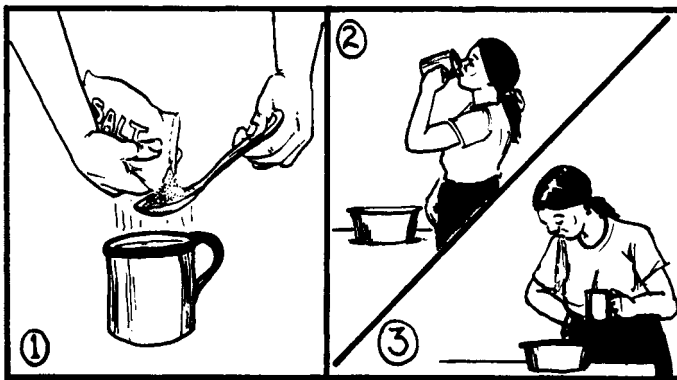
HEALTHY TEETH AND GUMS



CAVITIES AND GUM DISEASE

Infection from gum disease can spread into the root fibers and bone (see page 42). But **you can stop gum disease and prevent it from coming back**. There are two things to do: clean your teeth better and strengthen your gums.

1. Even if your gums are sore and they bleed, you must still clean the teeth beside them. If more food collects on the teeth, the gum infection will get even worse. Get a **soft** brush and use it gently. This way you will not hurt the gums when you clean.
2. To make your gums stronger and more able to fight the infection:
 - Eat more fresh fruits and green leafy vegetables, and fewer soft sticky foods from the store.
 - Rinse your mouth with warm salt water. Do this every day, even after your gums feel better.



(1) Mix some salt with a cup of warm water. (2) Take a mouthful and rinse. (3) Spit it out. Repeat until all of the salt water is finished.

MORE SERIOUS GUM DISEASE

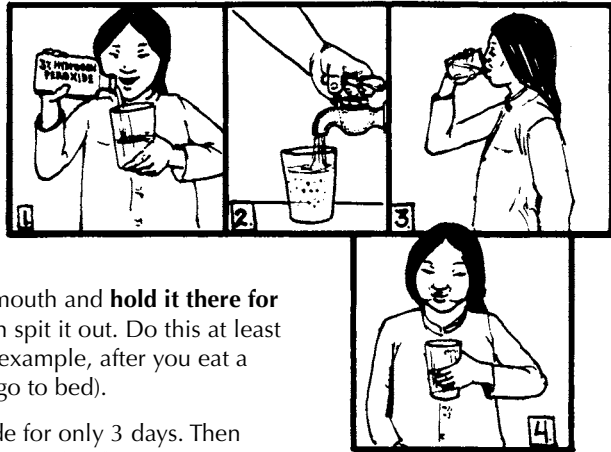
Painful gums that bleed at the slightest touch need special treatment. If you have this problem, ask for help. A dental worker can explain what is happening and what needs to be done. A dental worker can also scrape the teeth and remove the tartar that is poking the gums, making them sore.

At home, you can do some things to help.

- Clean your teeth near the gums with a soft brush. **Gently** push the brush between the tooth and the gum. It may bleed at first, but as the gums toughen, the bleeding will stop.
- Make your food soft, so it is easier to chew. Pounded yam and soup are good examples.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. If it is difficult for you to bite into fruit, squeeze it and drink the juice.
- Start rinsing your mouth with a mixture of **hydrogen peroxide** and water. You can get hydrogen peroxide from your clinic or your pharmacy (chemist).

The strength of hydrogen peroxide is important. Ask for a 3% solution, and mix it evenly with water—that is, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of hydrogen peroxide with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water.

WARNING: Read the label to be sure the solution is 3%. A mixture with more than 3% hydrogen peroxide can burn the mouth.



Take some into your mouth and **hold it there for about 2 minutes**. Then spit it out. Do this at least 4 times each day (for example, after you eat a meal and before you go to bed).

Use hydrogen peroxide for only 3 days. Then change and start rinsing with salt water (page 7).

If you take care, you can keep your teeth for a lifetime.