Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

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**The importance of good teeth**

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Presenter: Jan Tennant

Interviewee: Col. Brij Lal Verma, New Delhi, India

**Special note**

Please read this item carefully and the note at the end before using it.

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a world‑wide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, Massey Ferguson, and the University of Guelph.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to help people stay healthy. Today our subject is The Importance of Good Teeth. Here's Jan Tennant.

**TENNANT:** We've talked before on this program about how we need to eat good food if we want to be healthy. But to eat these good foods, we have to be able to bite and chew. And to be able to bite and chew, of course, we need strong teeth. We need good strong teeth to be able to eat the foods we must have to stay strong and healthy.

If your teeth are healthy, they are white and hard. They are the hardest, strongest part of your body and with them you can chew food that's very hard.

If a tooth has a hole in it, or is broken, it will hurt when you chew hard food. It can hurt when you eat sweet things, or food that's very hot, or very cold. If you don't get the tooth fixed, it can start hurting all the time. Your face may swell up and you'll feel sick.

So how can you keep your teeth strong, hard, and healthy? There are two things you need to do: eat good food, and clean your teeth every day.

Food that's good for your teeth is food that's good for your whole body—foods like vegetables and fruits, grains and beans, eggs, milk, cheese, fish, meat. It's especially important for children, whose teeth are still growing, to eat good food. Breast milk helps a baby's teeth grow strong.

Some foods are bad for your teeth. Sweet foods, like sugar, stick on your teeth and make holes in them. At first, the holes are very small, so small in fact, that you can't see them. But after a while they'll get bigger, and before long you may get a toothache. If you've ever had a toothache, you know that it can really hurt, and even make you feel sick.

It's important always to remember that sugar and other sweet foods make holes in your teeth quickly. Of course you want your children to have good, strong teeth, so don't give them sweet foods to eat. Don't sweeten their milk with sugar. And most important, never give a baby anything sweet to drink from a bottle—not sweet tea, sugar water, or bottled pop drinks that you buy.

There is another important thing you need to do to have strong, healthy teeth—keep your teeth clean. Small bits of food often get caught in your teeth, or between the tooth and the gum. You should clean your teeth every day to get rid of the bits of food that get stuck on your teeth. Some of this food you can feel with your tongue, but some of it is mixed in with the juices in your mouth and you can't even feel it or see it.

To keep your teeth clean, you don't have to buy a toothbrush and toothpaste at the store. Many people use a brushing stick, or chewing stick that they make themselves. You can make one out of a twig, a small branch that you cut from a tree or shrub. Perhaps you know of one that people in your area use for this. Be sure that you cut a brushing stick that's not too hard, one that will bend a little without breaking. Take off 3 to 4 cm (1‑1/2 inches) of the bark from one end. To make this end like a brush, you can chew it, or pound it with a rock. Be sure this cleaning end of the brush is soft so it won't hurt the gums.

If trees or shrubs called neem grow in your area, Colonel Brij Lal Verma in India has some good advice for you:

**VERMA:** You cut a green twig about 9 inches (25 centimetres) long and about 1/4 inch (1/2 centimetre) in diameter. It tastes bitter, but it is amazing that after you have chewed the end of it and you taste the juice of the neem in your mouth, you feel a strange freshness in your mouth.

With a little experience, the chewed part of the twig can turn into a very fine toothbrush—not soft, not hard. With this, you can gently massage your gums; and also, with a rotary movement, you can brush the surface of your teeth.

**TENNANT:** Some people dip the wet brush in salt, baking soda, or powdered charcoal before brushing. Some people use toothpaste. Any of these things are good to do. However, it's the brush that does the cleaning, so really water on the brush is enough. It's always best after you have eaten a meal to brush your teeth.

It's important though, to clean all of your teeth. The big back teeth are not as easy to clean as the others, so take special care to get them clean too. Brush all the sides of the teeth. Push the hairs of your brush between the teeth and sweep the food away. When you're finished brushing, wash your mouth with water to remove any loose bits of food. Then feel your teeth with your tongue. Are they smooth and clean? If you've brushed your teeth carefully, they should be.

Your children need help to brush their teeth. An older child can clean his own teeth if you show him how. A younger child cannot. Every day, someone older should clean a young child's teeth for him. For a baby, you can wipe the teeth with a clean cloth after the baby eats.

If you do find that you have a hole in a tooth, you should get it fixed right away. A small hole can grow bigger and deeper and part of the tooth could break off. If you don't get a tooth fixed as soon as you know there's a hole in it, before long you'll have a toothache. If you notice anything wrong with a tooth, you should stop it from getting worse.

Better yet, look after your teeth, and your children's teeth, so they don't get holes in them. To have good teeth, remember these three things:

 \* eat good food

 \* avoid sweet foods and foods with sugar

 \* clean your teeth every day.

For the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, this is Jan Tennant.

**Note**

In this item, the use of a tooth brushing stick made of neem wood is suggested. If neem (*Azadirachta indica*) does not grow in your area, instead of neem, you should suggest using the appropriate kind of wood that does grow locally.

**Information source for this item**

1. Where There is no Dentist (188 pages), by Murray Dickson, published by The Hesperian Foundation, P.O. Palo Alto, California, U.S.A. 2010 edition available at: [https://modernsurvivalonline.com/Files/medical/wtndentist\_2010\_Web\_Full\_Book.pdf](https://modernsurvivalonline.com/Files/medical/wtndentist_2010_Web_Full_Book.pdf%20)