

Dental Hygiene / Keeping Our Lives Clean

Tita: Most people don't like dentists! One day I went to a friend's birthday party. I didn't know many people there, so I introduced myself and began chatting with some women. They were discussing a visit to the dentist: "I hate going to the dentist," one of them said, "it always hurts! I'd rather *give birth* than go to the dentist".

"Oh yes, I hate going to the dentist too - I only go when I really, really have to," said another lady.

"Yes," someone else said, "I think dentists must be cruel people who enjoy 'torturing' others, because *everything* they do is painful. Honestly... who would ever want to be a dentist?"

I could not stop myself from smiling... "Why are you smiling?" one of them asked me.

"Because *I'm* a dentist and you're not the first people I've met who hate dentists".
"Oh no!" – they said...and we all laughed together!

Carol: Hello, here we are back again on *Women of Hope*...I'm Carol, Tammy's here too...

Tammy: Hello...and Tita, how did you feel when you heard that?

Tita: Well, it was funny really! I know how some people feel about dentists! But plenty of people cannot go to a dentist, and they have to put up with terrible toothache, and even lose their teeth. That would be worse.

Tammy: Well. It's good to have you here again today Tita...

Tita: Thank you – and don't worry I haven't come to fix your teeth – just to talk with you about how to take *care* of your teeth!!

Tammy: That's a relief!

Carol: Perhaps you've had bad and painful experiences with your teeth. I know I have. How about you Tammy?

Tammy: Oh yes – I'm like that lady who likes to put off going to the dentist until she really, really has to!!

Tita: Well ladies...I have very good news for you today.

Carol: You do?

Tita: Yes...you know, the best weapon you can have to prevent any dental problems is a simple toothbrush.

Tammy: I can almost hear you saying, “What...just a tooth brush?” “It can’t be that simple”.

Tita: Yes it is! In our mouths we have a huge number of tiny bugs called bacteria. We talked about these a while ago when we talked about taking care of our tongue.

Carol: Oh yes, when my neighbor’s little boy bit his tongue.

Tita: That’s right... When we eat, little tiny pieces of food stick to our teeth and become what we call dental plaque. Many little germs in our mouth, that we call bacteria, feed on that food. This produces an acid that starts to damage the hard white surface of our teeth...the enamel.

If we don’t clean our teeth, more and more of the plaque attaches to our teeth...and those little bacteria produce more and more acid. In time, this acid creates the holes in our teeth. If we let the holes become big they’re very painful and need to be filled by the dentist. Or the holes become so big that the whole tooth has to come out.

Tammy: So that’s why I need to brush my teeth carefully...so I don’t have to go to the dentist so often!

Tita: Yes Tammy – there’s no need to be afraid of the dentist!

Now, do you use a broom to sweep the floor? ...I’m sure you do – as I do too. We sweep the rubbish out of the corners and away from the furniture; we don’t push it under the furniture and into the corners, do we?

Well think of your toothbrush as a tiny broom...it does the same job. It’s meant to sweep the flat surfaces of your teeth to remove the plaque.

Carol: Ok, so tell us the best way for us to use our toothbrush.

Tita: Sure...it’s important not to just scrub back and forth on your teeth as this can wear down the enamel. For the upper teeth touch the bristles of the tooth brush on the surface of the tooth – at the top – and make a downward sweeping movement. This ‘sweeps the plaque away from the teeth. Do the same with the lower teeth but sweep the surfaces upward. And remember the inside surface as well as the outside surface.

Tammy: And what about those big molars at the back? How do we clean those?

Tita: Well they have spikey surfaces to chew food, so you move the brush backwards and forwards across the top.

Carol: Here on *Women of Hope* Tita, our dentist is telling us how to use our toothbrush like a little broom...sweeping down the top teeth from the top to the bottom – to sweep away the food.

Tammy: And for the bottom teeth – the opposite – we sweep up from the bottom.

Carol: Tita what if we don't have a toothbrush?

Tita: Well, did you know that you can use a piece of burnt bread? As you toast some bread, you could let a little bit on the corner get burnt over the fire. Take that burnt part and crush it into a powder. Put a bit of that powder on your finger. This powder is rough and with the sweeping movement of your finger, the same way as with the brush, it will remove the plaque from your teeth. Not bad hey? Or, you can take a piece of clean cloth, and rub it in the same way on your teeth and it will remove the plaque!

And don't worry about toothpaste if you don't have it. That's only used to give you a nice feeling of a fresh breath. The important thing is removing plaque off the teeth.

Carol: When my children were small I was not sure when to start brushing their teeth. When should you start Tita?

Tita: Good question Carol. Did you know you should brush a baby's teeth? When that first tooth appears, it needs to be cleaned.

Carol: Even when they're so tiny?

Tita: Yes, because even the breast milk or formula from a bottle, is food for bacteria. They can begin making holes in those tiny teeth! For a baby all that's needed is a damp cloth wrapped around one of your fingers and you rub it gently against the baby's teeth after each feed.

Soon, when their mouth is a bit bigger you can begin using a small, soft, tooth brush. Don't be surprised if they only want to play with the tooth brush at first. Let them play a little, then you must do the brushing. Children up to 4 yrs old can't do the arm and hand movements properly. They'll just suck the toothpaste off the brush and not really clean their teeth.

Tammy: I remember my son doing that – he loved the toothpaste!

Tita: Yes – children usually do. But of course, as they grow up, teach them how to brush their teeth by themselves. As the child holds the toothbrush in their hand, you hold their hand and do the right movements for them. They may not want to let you do it, because children think they know how to do it themselves don't they?

It may be hard work for you in the beginning, but don't give up! First help them, then guide them gently to do it correctly. Make it a fun time. After a while they'll learn and do a good job by themselves.

Carol: Tita, some people say that they only brush their teeth in the morning before having breakfast!

Tita: That's not enough. Remember that every time there's a bit of food left on your teeth, bacteria will get busy destroying them! So clean your teeth in the morning *after* you've eaten and in the evening before bed.

Carol: It's really good to know how we can help our family take care of their teeth. I wonder if you've ever had bleeding gums? We'll come back after this song and ask Tita about it...

Carol: We have our dentist friend, Tita, with us. So Tita – is it common to have bleeding gums? And what causes it?

Tita: It is more common as we grow older. This is a kind of alarm system to let us know something's wrong. When the area where the tooth joins the gum has a lot of plaque, the gums become inflamed and red...and start to bleed. If we don't remove the plaque, the bone under the gums, that holds all our teeth in place, starts being destroyed. The teeth will become loose and eventually fall out.

Tammy: I certainly don't want that to happen to *my* teeth. So what can we do about it if our gums bleed?

Tita: You can still clean your teeth - in fact start cleaning them at least *3 times* each day. Don't worry if when you do this your gums bleed a lot, the more they bleed the quicker the inflammation and redness will go away...and you will have healthier gums and bone! It's that simple.

Ah! And by the way, false teeth need to be brushed too. If they don't get brushed, the plaque sticks to them and can cause infections in the soft parts of the mouth!

Carol: So Tita, now we understand why you said that the simple answer to our fear of the dentist is... a toothbrush!

Tammy: So dentists actually want to help people *get rid of* the pain...but they can't help if people are afraid and don't come to see them can they?

Tita: That's right! The longer you wait to get treatment, the bigger the problem will become and the more painful the treatment will be.

Carol: So...out with the toothbrush – in the morning and in the evening...and let's help our whole family to clean their teeth well. Then they won't be afraid of the dentist either!

Tita: When I think of how plaque damages teeth I always think of how sin works the same way in our lives. Have you heard the word sin? Do you know what it is? It is something that we do, or say that is wrong. It is not pleasing to God. If we leave the plaque on our teeth the problems get bigger and more painful. Sin may begin as a simple little thing, but if we don't deal with it, the affects will grow bigger and bring pain into our lives.

This may all sound a bit strange, so let me explain with a story from God's word, the Bible about King David. (From 2 Samuel 11&12)

David lived many centuries ago and was chosen by God to be king of the people of Israel. David began doing a great job, because he always talked to God through prayer and asked God to guide him, especially when he had important decisions to make.

One time, however, David stayed at home, though he should have been leading his army, who were fighting their enemies. One evening as he walked on the flat roof of his house, he looked into the neighbor's house and saw a beautiful woman called Bathsheba taking a bath. He liked her...and wanted her...so he sent for her. She obediently came. But David used his power in the wrong way and slept with her. And then she sent news to David that she was pregnant! David was worried! He began plotting different ways to make this look as if Bathsheba's baby was her own husband's child.

So he sent for Uriah, her husband, to return from war and suggested he should enjoy some time with her. But Uriah being a man of integrity refused to enjoy his wife, whilst his men were in danger. David's attempt at pretending the baby was not his had failed. In his desperation David created a plan to have Bathsheba's husband killed at the battle front...and so it happened as he had planned.

Phew...! David must have felt relieved! Now he could get on with his life, and he made Bathsheba his wife.

Tammy: This sounds a bit like a fairy tale doesn't it? "And they lived happily ever after..."

Tita: But they didn't! David's actions were not pleasing to God, they were against his law, they were *sins*! Adultery led to lies and lies to murder! Can you see how one sin led to another and another? And David's relief didn't last long. He began feeling so guilty! This is how he described his feelings: "When I did not confess my sin, I was

weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long, day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.” (Psalm 32:3 NLT)

God knew how he felt. God’s word tells us that he was angry at what David had done; but he also loved David very much. So God sent a messenger to confront David. David suddenly realized that he had not only sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, he had sinned against God (Ps 51:4). He broke down and confessed his sins to God. Confessing means that he admitted to God the wrong he had done and asked for *his* forgiveness.

The messenger told him that God would forgive him, but that there would be great trouble in his family as a result of what he had done. And there was, because when we make wrong choices it has results. It affects other people too. Later David wrote: “Finally I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.” (Ps 32:5)

Tammy: Wow! It sounds too good to be true doesn’t it? Perhaps too easy?

Tita: Well no, it was not easy, and I’m sure David always felt really bad about Uriah’s death. But that simple, heartfelt confession took away David’s guilt before God. He prayed: ‘Remove my sin... create a pure, new heart in me, O God.’ (Ps 51:7,10) Now he could move on with his life without the power of sin leading him to do *more* wrong things. God forgave him and he learnt from his mistake. God still used him as one of the most important kings in the history of Israel.

Tammy: The reality of life is that you and I will always do or say things that don’t please God. Unless we admit we have done wrong and ask God to forgive us, one bad thing leads to another. Just as leaving plaque on our teeth will cause bigger and bigger problems.

Tita: Perhaps *you* are living right now with a heavy feeling of guilt, because of mistakes, or things you’ve done that are wrong. Perhaps your actions have hurt others just like David’s. Living with these kinds of feelings is hard. That little voice of your conscience keeps reminding you of those wrong actions or words.

Don’t despair, if you are carrying the guilt of sin, turn to God and tell him what you’ve done. Say sorry to him and ask him to forgive you. In the Bible we read that “if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong,” (1 John 1:9 NLT) and that is exactly what David did. As God’s word says, he *will* forgive you immediately and you can move on with your life without the burden of guilt. As you learn to do this regularly you will prevent the damage of sin growing in your life!

Carol: Thank you Tita. Maybe we can think about what you've told us today every time we brush our teeth.

Tammy: Yes – and maybe each evening as we brush our teeth we could think about anything we may have done that day that we should ask God to forgive us for.

Carol: Before we go today, I'd like to pray...to God, our heavenly father who loves us. Would you like to join me as we pray?

Father, God, thank you for loving us, and for wanting us to be free from the burden of guilt that we so often carry with us. I pray that you will forgive each of us for the sin in our lives – the things we've done that are not pleasing to you. We pray this in the name of your son Jesus, who took the punishment for all our sins, Amen

Tammy: If you have any questions about the things we've talked about, you can write to us in care of this station or at *Women of Hope*.

We would love to hear from you.

We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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