

Importance of Daily Oral Care Essay

Introduction

Maintaining oral health is a major issue in the medical field. It is vital in keeping healthy on the whole, along with an imperative effect on the personality of each individual. Keeping good oral health practices may help minimize deadly diseases, and reduce risks of serious illnesses. Oral health involves keeping the mouth, gums, and teeth hygienic, by taking proper care of them and giving them due attention.

How oral health affects overall health

Prevention of gums from cavities and diseases is the chief aspect of good oral health. This can be done by regular cleaning, brushing, and flossing of the teeth on a daily basis, which would help prevent bacterial infections and the emergence of plaque. Plaque is caused by constant bacterial action due to a lack of oral hygiene. This bacterium infects the teeth by forming layers upon layers, appearing in the form of tartar.

Oral bacteria entering the bloodstream

The bacteria from the mouth, if not removed, can enter the bloodstream, and affect overall health by aggravating pre-existing diseases.

The mouth is a Mirror into person's health

The mouth of a person reflects his personality greatly because it is the main focus while looking at other people during a conversation. It depicts the personal hygiene one possesses and is indicative of the liking for oral hygiene.

Links between oral health and following diseases

Poor oral health has been found linked to many diseases- the relation lies in the fact that the unhygienic conditions of the mouth aggravate any bacterial infections that are present in the body.

- **Pneumonia**

Pneumonia is a very common cause of death in elderly nursing home residents. The dental plaque present gives rise to pneumonia-causing bacteria, which get into the respiratory tract through silent aspiration (Jurasek, 2002).

- **Candidiasis**

Candidiasis is a fungal infection that is caused by the yeast *Candida Albicans*. Denture wearers suffer most from the disease, because of a lack of oral hygiene. It is essential to remove dentures and keep the mouth clean especially after mealtimes (American Dental Association, 2009).

- **Diabetes**

In diabetic patients, oral candidiasis is more prevalent, which can be treated with antifungal medicines. But the most important element is to keep oral hygiene so that such an instance does not initiate. The wounds of diabetic patients take longer to heal, which can affect overall health too.

- **Heart Disease**

The bacteria that affect the gums due to unhygienic conditions of the mouth may enter the bloodstream and also affect the arteries, according to current research. Studies have shown that bacteria infecting the gums can now travel freely throughout the body. The bacteria invade the coronary arteries, causing blockage, and clotting. Another link of oral hygiene to heart disease is the formation of plaque, which causes swelling up of the arteries (American Academy of Periodontology, 2008).

- **Stroke**

Stroke is also caused due to the same aforementioned reason.

- **Respiratory Infections**

Respiratory infections occur when the bacteria from the gums enter the bloodstream and enter the lungs. Usually, respiratory infections are caused by aspiration or inhaling, but recent studies have shown the bacteria to enter the bloodstream through gum infections. The lower respiratory tract is affected by bacterial invasion.

- **Bacterial Endocarditis**

Bacterial endocarditis is a heart disease in which the valves or inner lining of the heart is affected by germs. Good daily oral hygiene habits may prevent endocarditis, plus, a visit to a dentist every six months, and regular brushing and flossing may also help reduce risks of dental diseases, which may lead to fatal diseases such as the aforementioned ("Infective Endocarditis", 2009).

- **Low birth weight and Premature Babies**

Premature babies may also result from periodontal disease. When bacteria from the mouth enter the bloodstream, the body produces prostaglandin to fight the bacteria, which causes muscle contraction, resulting in early labor. The bacterium *Pgingivalis* infects the placenta, which may

affect the growth and development of the fetus. Inflammatory chemicals may also be produced in a pregnant woman's body.

Common oral health conditions that may affect the elderly

- **Xerostomia**

Elderly people may suffer from dry mouth or xerostomia, because of the therapies they are going through. Patients, who are undergoing cancer therapies and the like, develop dry mouth because of the intensity of the medications. They may also be suffering from dry mouth as a result of some other diseases they may be suffering from, like arthritis, bone marrow transplantation, and neurological diseases.

- **Periodontal Disease**

Periodontal diseases occur as a result of bacterial infections, which give rise to root surface caries too.

- **Root Surface Caries**

Root surface caries are seen in these patients because of the long periods they are hospitalized, and are not given the medical attention they may need individually.

- **Oral Ulcerations**

Oral ulcers are additionally a cause of bacterial activity in the inner lining of the mouth, which gives rise to painful blisters and swelling; they are termed oral ulcers.

Daily oral hygiene for long-term care residents

- **Brushing Daily**

It is essential for every individual to brush teeth regularly, at least once daily, if not twice, to prevent gum diseases. For long-term care residents, because they are being rendered treatment for the disease and may neglect to keep oral hygiene, it is specifically crucial to pay attention to cleanliness. The hospital conditions may also be such that patients are uncomfortable, and may not pay heed to the importance of daily brushing.

- **Flossing**

Flossing regularly will help remove bacterial films from teeth.

- **Mouth Rinsing**

Mouth rinsing after meal intake is also essential for keeping the gums free of food particles which may enhance bacterial growth.

- **Sugar-free Chewing gum**

The sugars in food tend to stick to the teeth, giving bacteria the chance to act on them, which gradually cause plaque, and eventually, tartar. Thus sugar-free chewing gum would be a good substitute for regular gum, to prohibit infection.

- **Denture Care**

If dentures are worn, they need to be removed regularly for cleaning, and then restored. Dentures need to be washed regularly and the gums need cleaning so that minimal bacterial growths take place to aggravate the disease that already subsists.

Daily oral hygiene modifications

- **OT/PT Consult**

Oral hygienic maintenance can be advised by the physician, to the patients. Patients are told the importance of keeping oral hygiene and maintaining it. Consulting always helps, because patients can get convinced verbally, about the importance of keeping the mouth clean, and of brushing teeth. Brushing teeth is the most common and best way to maintain oral health. By tooth brushing, the bacterial film which forms on teeth is removed. This action keeps the buccal cavity protected from any bacterial infections.

- **Duct Tape**

One way to improve and make more effective the brushing of teeth is to modify the toothbrush, so as to reach far-reaching areas while cleaning. Duct tape is applied to the handle of the toothbrush, which causes enlargements in the brush. A larger handle helps grasp the toothbrush, which would help in proper cleaning of the teeth (Spratt, et.al, 1997).

- **Bicycle Handle**

The size of the handle of the toothbrush can be increased easily with some household tricks, like the use of a bicycle handle. Floss is helpful in removing plaque from the teeth, and regular flossing is recommended for oral healthcare, even to normal healthy people.

- **Electric Brush**

Electric toothbrushes have also been designed for ease of cleaning the teeth. The electric toothbrush has an oscillating head, due to which it is also called the rotary brush. It has not been found to cleanse better than the ordinary manual brush, however, it is a good modification for the elderly people who would prefer keeping from the trouble of manual brushing.

Another oral hygiene device that may be used is a disposable applicator that attaches to the fingertip of the individual using it. The finger acts like a handle that controls the applicator while it cleanses the gums and oral cavities of the mouth. The gums can be massaged this way too,

along with the teeth and interproximal areas. The shape of the applicator is such that it covers the fingertip smoothly, and there is an adhesive at the base, which ensures a good grip. On the top layer, are small bristles that help in the cleaning process.

Simple steps in performing daily oral care in nursing homes may reduce hospital stays and improve the overall quality of living

Simple steps in brushing teeth may help maintain good oral health, which is imperative to the overall health of residents in nursing care. It is apparent that lack of oral hygiene may affect the overall health of individuals, and may worsen the conditions of those who are already suffering from some disease. Daily brushing and mouth cleaning after mealtimes may help reduce risks of disease and may improve the quality of life of individuals who are seeking treatment in the hospital.

Summary of why oral care is imperative to the overall health of residents

Oral care needs to be maintained if good general health is sought because both are interlinked. Residents need to take special care because of their pre-existing illness and have to ensure that their carelessness in oral hygiene will not cause further complications in the disease.

References

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