

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Use of Ayurveda in promoting dental health and preventing dental caries

Sir,

Dental caries is a complex, multifactorial condition and a predominant cause of tooth decay.^[1] In Ayurveda, dental health (called *danta swasthya* in Sanskrit) is very individualistic and varies with each person's constitution (*prakriti*) and climatic changes resulting from solar, lunar and planetary influences (*kala-parinama*).^[2] The body constitution is classified based on the predominance of one or more of three physical humors (*doshas*). These are wind (*vata*), bile (*pitta*) and phlegm (*kapha*). The presence of a specific *dosha* in an individual and in nature determines health care in Ayurveda, including dental health. In India, using chewing sticks has been mentioned in ancient Ayurveda texts.^[3] It is recommended that chewing sticks are obtained from fresh stems of specific plants. The stems should be healthy, soft, without leaves or knots and taken from a healthy tree. Chewing on these stems is believed to cause attrition and leveling of biting surfaces, facilitate salivary secretion and, possibly, help in plaque control, while some stems have an anti-bacterial action. With reference to the individual's constitution and dominant *dosha*, it is mentioned that people with the *vata dosha* dominant may develop atrophic and receding gums and are recommended to use chewing sticks with bitter-sweet or astringent tastes, such as licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and black catechu or the cutch tree (*Acacia Catechu Linn*), respectively.^[3] Individuals with the *pitta dosha* dominant are recommended to use chewing sticks with a bitter taste such as the twigs from the margosa tree (*Azadirachta indica* or *neem*) and the arjuna tree (*Terminalia arjuna*). Those with the *kapha dosha* dominant are likely to have pale and hypertrophic gums and are asked to use chewing sticks with a pungent taste, citing the fever nut (*Caesalipinia bonduc*) and the common milkweed plant (*Calotropis procera*). Present-day research has shown that all the chewing sticks described in ancient Ayurveda texts (*circa* 200 BC) have medicinal and anti-cariogenic properties.^[4]

Shirley Telles, Naveen KV, Acharya Balkrishna
Patanjali Yoogpeeth, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India.
E-mail: shirleytelles@gmail.com

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