



## INTRODUCTION

Oral health is an integral part of general health. Oral problems can impact on self-esteem of children and lead to problems eating, speaking and attendance to learning. Dental disease is preventable, treatable and can be caught early. Variety of diseases affect the oral cavity involving dental caries, dental erosion, periodontal disease, dental infection, missing teeth and traumatic injuries to primary and permanent teeth (*Dean et al., 1993*). Common dental problems seen in children are cavities and gingivitis. Unless these problems if not caught early and treated, they can develop into more severe problems and cause unnecessary suffering (*McGuire, 2005*).

Correct nutrition is essential for good physical health. Nutrition also plays a key role in the development and maintenance of a healthy mouth, especially the teeth and gums. Eating food affects the teeth and at the same time, the health or lack of health of teeth and gums affect what can be eaten. Good dental health begins early in life and must be practiced throughout life (*Anderson and Brown, 2006*). The role of diet in oral health is two folds. First, food and its nutrients contribute to the health of the mouth as well as to overall health. Second eating habits have a direct effect on dental caries. The ability of various carbohydrate-containing foods to contribute to dental caries depends on how well it adheres to the tooth surface and how frequently it is consumed (*Hornick, 2002*).

Bacteria growing on teeth, particularly plaque causes tooth decay and gum diseases. If plaque, the sticky film on the teeth is not cleaned this leads to bacterial growth. These organisms produce acids by breaking down



sugar and starch and acid production results in damage of enamel (*Ismail, 2007*).

Good oral hygiene such as brushing and flossing daily prevents the harmful bacteria present in the mouth from causing problems. Proper gum care is essential to a healthy mouth. Brushing along the gum line helps remove plaque where it builds up the most. Flossing is important because it can remove plaque build up where it is hardest to get at and will therefore build up more. Poor oral hygiene can lead to any number of medical problems ranging from the minor to more serious ones. Unfortunately the minor problems have a tendency to grow into larger problems if left untreated. Gum disease can lead to tooth loss, cavities can grow and cause pain and eventually one ends up with a dead tooth ( *Padolsky and Smith, 2007*) .

Fluoride intake from birth has been shown to reduce dental caries. During tooth development, fluoride is incorporated into the tooth structure making the tooth strong and decay resistant (*Glock and Horowitz, 2001*).

Common bad habits occur during childhood such as thumb sucking, nail biting, mouth breathing, use of pacifier habits leading to dental problems if not treated early. It was said that parents should be aware of child's habits and become proactive rather than remaining passive. When notice changes in child's teeth due to thumb sucking or due to any other reason, one should not delay because the consequences of waiting will only mean more extensive and expensive treatment later. Prevention and early intervention are the best solutions to any health problems or concerns(*Hockenberry, 2005*).



The school nurses facilitate positive student responses to normal development; promote health and safety, intervene with actual and potential health problems; provide case management services; and actively collaborate with others to build student and family capacity for adaptation, self-management, self-advocacy and learning (*Collins and corridan, 2005*).