Review links protruding teeth to long-term oral health risks

By DTI

ADELAIDE, Australia: A new systematic review has reported that children with protruding primary or early permanent teeth have an increased chance of damaging them. However, the researchers affirmed that the oral health risks linked to protruding teeth can be significantly reduced without entailing prohibitive costs.

The review, undertaken at the University of Adelaide, included 41 studies and more than 50,000 children aged under 19 years and confirmed a direct link between the degree to which a young patient’s teeth protrude and the probability of damaging them. “Traumatic dental injuries have been identified as the fifth most prevalent disease or injury globally and their subsequent management is costly,” said Dr Esma Dogramaci, lecturer in orthodontics in the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Adelaide Dental School. “While the number of traumatic dental injuries have fallen over recent decades, they have significant physical, psychological and economic consequences,” she added. “Young children up to the age of 6 years with teeth that stick out more than 3 mm have over three times higher chance of trauma than children without protruding teeth. Children over 6 years with teeth that protrude more than 5 mm have over double the chance of trauma.”

According to Dogramaci, corrective orthodontic treatment of children’s teeth is not usually undertaken until all permanent teeth have erupted, usually after the age of 12 years. However, an expensive visit to an orthodontist is not essential to protect protruding teeth, she said. “A dentist can easily measure how far a child’s teeth stick out and recommend whether they should be fitted with a brace. They can apply simple braces which can reduce the prominence of protruding teeth and significantly reduce the chance of them being damaged,” explained Dogramaci.

In order to protect protruding teeth from damage, Dogramaci recommends discouraging children from sucking their thumb and suggests they wear a mouth guard. “Early identification and protection of protruding teeth through regular dental check-ups reduces the chance of early problems becoming long-term dental issues,” she commented. “If young teeth are broken or knocked out, long-term issues may occur, like the need for root canal treatment or even tooth loss, requiring a lifetime commitment for general dental treatment.”

“Also, if orthodontic treatment is carried out on teeth that have previously suffered from trauma, further complications can occur during orthodontics that could lead to the loss of those teeth,” she added.

“The results of this study confirm that regular check-ups, particularly for children, are a must for good long-term dental health.”

The study, titled “The association of overjet size and traumatic dental injuries—A systematic review and meta-analysis”, was published online on 6 May 2019 in Dental Traumatology, ahead of inclusion in an issue.
Study finds genetic make-up has little impact on oral health

By DTI

MELBOURNE, Australia: The idea that oral health comes down to genetics can be a damaging one. According to authors of a recent study, which followed the oral health of twins from birth to age 6, there is no link, and the idea that there is can prevent people from changing their damaging oral health habits.

Led by Dr Mihiri Silva from the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, the study followed 173 sets of twins, identical and non-identical. “How genetics impacts on dental health has not often been studied. This is the first twin study that looks at both genetics and early life risk factors, such as illness and lifestyle.”

According to Silva, the study’s results found that identical twins— with identical genomes—had varying degrees of dental caries. “This means that environmental factors, like a lack of fluoride in water, seem to be the prime cause of cavities not genetic make-up,” she explained.

Despite genetics not playing a role in oral health, the study did reveal a link between the mother’s health and lifestyle during pregnancy and the child’s future dental health, with obesity in pregnancy a definite marker for increased risk of childhood caries. “Perhaps the mother’s weight has a biological influence on the developing foetus or perhaps the risk of decay rises because of increased sugar consumption in that household,” hypothesised Silva.

Another concerning result to come out of the study was the estimation that one in three Australian children have cavities by the time they start school. With the 2011 Victorian Department of Health and Human Services statistics showing that more than 26,000 Australians under the age of 15 are admitted to hospital to treat cavities every year, the estimation may not be too far off.

“Our findings also reinforce how important it is for paediatricians and other health professionals to educate children to start preventive measures early in life, prior to the onset of damage to dental tissues,” concluded Silva.

The study, titled “Genetic and early-life environmental influences on dental caries risk: A twin study”, was published in the May 2019 issue of Pediatrics.
Fluoride reduces dental risk from minimal and extended breastfeeding, study says

By DTI

ADELAIDE, Australia: A recent study has examined the interaction between fluoridated water consumption and breastfeeding duration in relation to dental caries experience. The findings suggest that exposing children to fluoridated water may reduce the risk of dental caries.

According to a report published in the Oral health and dental care in Australia: key facts and figures, in 2010, 55 per cent of 6-year-olds had experienced dental caries in their primary teeth. The new research looked at dental caries in 5- and 6-year-olds in Australia and examined whether they had been exposed to fluoridated water or breastfed as infants and for what duration. The study used data collected in one of the largest and most comprehensive population-based studies of child oral health in Australia, the National Child Oral Health Study 2012–14.

The findings indicated that breastfeeding for over a month and up to 24 months was associated with good oral health. Minimal breastfeeding, which includes no breastfeeding or breastfeeding for less than one month, however, and extended breastfeeding beyond 24 months were both linked to increased dental cavities. However, these effects were lessened if children were exposed to fluoridated water.

“Breastfeeding is important not only for general health but also for the dental health of young children,” said senior author Dr Loc Giang Do, a professor in the Faculty of Health and Medical Science at the University of Adelaide’s Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health. “Minimal breastfeeding can increase risk for having dental decay in children, as can sustained breastfeeding beyond 24 months,” he added. “However, potential risk can be reduced by drinking fluoridated water in formula or ensuring that breastfed children are given fluoridated water to drink after the age of 6 months.”

According to Do, in fluoridated areas, breastfeeding can be recommended beyond the age of 24 months, while in non-fluoridated areas, breastfeeding for up to 24 months is recommended not only for child general health and development but also for child dental health. “The use of fluoridated tap water should be recommended for young children,” Do commented and added that the dental profession should support and even encourage mothers of infants to breastfeed.
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CPAG calls for free dental care and healthcare for all youth

By DTI

AUCKLAND, New Zealand: Early childhood dental caries is the most common chronic disease seen in children and a leading cause of hospital admissions for New Zealand children. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is attempting to tackle the issue by calling for free universal healthcare, including dentistry, prescriptions and specialist hearing and vision care, for all children and adolescents younger than 18 years of age.

In a recent submission, the Child Poverty Action Group has recommended taking immediate steps to achieve free dental care and healthcare for all young people under 18 years. (Photograph: pikselstock/Shutterstock)

“Research shows that adolescence is one of the two periods that are critically important for social and physical development, the other being preconception to 3 years of age,” said paediatrician and CPAG children’s health spokesperson Prof. Innes Asher. “It is vital that all our teenagers can easily access appropriate and timely primary healthcare. Their health and futures should not have to rely on their families’ ability to afford healthcare, as is currently the case.”

According to the group, children living in poverty are at a higher risk of falling ill and dying compared with other children. That is why CPAG’s recommendations are designed to help achieve not only healthcare access equity but also health equity for all young people. "Primary care and public health is where our focus needs to start. Significant long-standing underfunding in these areas is one reason that too many of our children are ending up hospitalised unnecessarily," said CPAG public health spokesperson Dr Nikki Turner, an associate professor and Director of the Immunisation Advisory Centre at the University of Auckland.

Currently, free GP visits in New Zealand are available to children aged 13 and under. Pregnant women are entitled to free maternity services but not to free GP visits or pregnancy-related dental care.
Eating disorders—Oral health professionals have role in early identification

By DTI

SYDNEY, Australia: Eating disorders and disordered eating together are estimated to affect over 16 per cent of the Australian population, according to the National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC). The Australian Dental Association (ADA) and the NEDC have collaborated in order to spread awareness about eating disorders and their identification and assessment and to encourage referral among oral health professionals.

Early intervention is critical for a patient with an eating disorder. The sooner treatment occurs, the better chance the individual has of recovery. Consequently, the oral health practitioner is uniquely positioned as one of the first healthcare providers consulted by an individual demonstrating disordered eating behaviour.

According to the National Practice Standards for Eating Disorders, a document drawn up by the NEDC, dental professionals fall into the group of early identifiers and initial responders. They are defined as follows: “Early identifiers have a duty of care for the well-being of people in high-risk groups for eating disorders and who are most likely to act as the first point of contact for people with eating disorders and their families. The role of early identifiers is to proactively engage people at risk to promote prevention and early help seeking.”

Intra-oral manifestations of nutritional deficiency present early in the clinical course of an eating disorder, and general tooth erosion can take approximately two years to appear. Swelling around the cheeks or jaw or bad breath can be physical warning signs of frequent vomiting. The ability of the oral health practitioner to recognise the subtle changes in the mouth of a patient is central to identifying early indicators of an eating disorder as early as possible.

The NEDC first partnered with the ADA New South Wales (NSW), as part of a combined project, where ADA NSW undertook a focus group of some of their members to understand their perspective on eating disorders, including how to approach a patient living with an eating disorder.

The feedback of this focus group resulted in the development of e-learning resources and provided significant progress in identifying the gaps that exist in the knowledge and identification of eating disorders and practices for a standard approach to care for patients with an eating disorder.

Researchers recruit Pasifika adolescents for oral health study

By DTI

DUNEDIN, New Zealand: The multicultural element of New Zealand society is something that brings with it many positives, but it can also create certain barriers for some groups. Among these many cultures, the Pacific Islanders make up a large proportion of the society, and in a new study, researchers from the University of Otago in Dunedin recruited Pasifika adolescents to interview groups of their peers about their understanding and experiences of oral healthcare and their attitudes towards it.

Despite dental care being free for all New Zealanders under 18, research shows that Pasifika adolescents living in New Zealand are less likely than their peers of other ethnicities to access it. In the first study of its kind, the researchers decided to source information directly from the group of interest in order to understand more accurately why this might be and what some of the most significant issues are.

According to the study, 17 Pasifika adolescents from four cities in various parts of New Zealand facilitated focus groups with 39 of their Pasifika peers. From the data collected, the researchers then conducted an inductive thematic analysis, and the paper focused on one central theme that emerged: the participants’ suggestions for increasing access to oral healthcare. Suggestions included reducing the cost of oral healthcare and oral health products, making access to clinics easier, including having transport arranged or having dentists visit schools, making the clinical environment more welcoming and youth-friendly, and having more approachable, younger and Pasifika or Maori oral health professionals working in the dental profession.

“Policy makers should look at implementing at least some of these suggestions for change, or at least treating them as a conversation starter on how to address the inequities in Pasifika adolescents’ oral healthcare access,” said lead author Dr Lee Smith, a research fellow in the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Otago.

Other recommendations dealt with increasing the emphasis placed on oral health in Pasifika families and communities through education, for example, by means of pamphlets in churches and advertising on visual and social media. It was suggested that this may be more effective in Pasifika languages.

The study, titled “Pasifika adolescents’ recommendations for increasing access to oral health care”, was published in the March 2019 issue of the New Zealand Dental Journal.
Mandible helps to uncover history of civilisations in Tibet

By DTI

LANZHOU, China: The journey that Homo sapiens has embarked on is something that has enthralled modern scientists for many centuries. Now, as technology continually improves, more understanding is being gained and new discoveries are coming to the surface. Recently, researchers revealed that a sister group of Neanderthals, the Denisovans, occupied the Tibetan Plateau long before Homo sapiens arrived in the region. This discovery was made through the analysis of a 160,000-year-old hominin mandible.

“Traces of Denisovan DNA are found in present-day Asian, Australian, and Melanesian populations, suggesting that these ancient hominins may have once been widespread,” said Prof Jean-Jacques Hublin, Director of the Department of Human Evolution at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (MPI-EVA) in Leipzig in Germany and one of the paper’s co-authors. “Yet, so far, the only fossils representing this ancient hominin group were identified at Denisova Cave.”

In their study, the researchers examined a mandible that was found on the Tibetan Plateau in Baishiya Karst Cave in Xiahe County in China. The fossil, originally discovered in 1980 by a local monk, was eventually passed on to Lanzhou University, and in 2010, researchers Prof. Fahu Chen and Dr Dongju Zhang began studying the cave site where the fossil had been found.

In 2016, Lanzhou University initiated a collaboration with the Department of Human Evolution at the MPI-EVA and since then they have been jointly analysing the fossil. According to the researchers, DNA was not able to be recovered from the mandible itself but rather from one of the molars, which they examined by means of ancient protein analysis. From that analysis, the team found that the mandible came from a member of a Denisovan group from Siberia—something that confirms Denisovans had already been living in the high-altitude setting significantly prior to the appearance of Homo sapiens.

With continued research and analysis planned for the future, the team now hope that the lower jaw can aid in piecing together the puzzle of what Denisovans looked like.

The study, titled “A late Middle Pleistocene Denisovan mandible from the Tibetan Plateau,” was published on 1 May 2019 in Nature.

ADA will continue its push for affordable dental care after Australian election

By DTI

SYDNEY, Australia: A few days after the Australian elections, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has reaffirmed its commitment to its continued work with the newly re-elected coalition to address the urgent and growing need for dental care for disadvantaged groups. The ADA has long lobbied successfully for the government to introduce the Australian Dental Health Plan (ADHP) in 2020.

Despite Labor’s loss, the emphasis on fulfilling the ADHP will continue with a coalition government, noted ADA President Dr Carmelo Bonanno. “During the election, the ADA was overwhelmed by feedback from both ADA branches around Australia and the public about the desperate need to provide oral healthcare to disadvantaged groups.”

“This is a critical area for the coalition government to address the needs of the disadvantaged for whom public waiting lists mean their oral health declines while they wait to be treated,” he explained. “Everyone in Australia, regardless of their ability to pay, should be able to receive dental care. Our goal is a robust model of a mix of affordable public and private dentistry which accommodates the dental needs of the whole community.”

The ADA has long lobbied successive federal governments to address the urgent and growing need for additional, targeted and sustainable funding to meet the requirements of disadvantaged Australians, and it will continue its push for affordable oral healthcare with the re-elected coalition government.

“We look forward to continue working with Minister [Gregory Andrew] Hunt to improve the dental health of the Australian public and will be lobbying for implementation of the ADA’s Australian Dental Health Plan,” Bonanno said. “As a non-partisan organisation, the ADA has long-standing relationships with both sides of the political divide. We will work productively with both the coalition government and the Labor opposition to bring about good policy for dentists and the Australians they treat.”