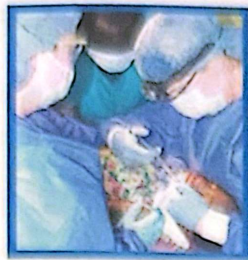


1

Teeth should be removed using only sterilised equipment to avoid infections.



2

An antibiotic and painkiller should be prescribed in case of persistent pain.



3

Biting on a tea bag can also stop bleeding. Tea has tannic acid, which constricts blood vessels.



FALSE TEETH: They do not exist, health experts warn

By Stella Naligwa

When Aisha Nalugwa gave birth to her baby girl, she was excited to become a mother.

However, when her baby turned three months, Nalugwa noticed that she had swollen/reddened gums, coupled with fever. Her child had also lost appetite for breast milk.

She consulted elderly people in her neighbourhood who said the child had false teeth referred to as *ebinyo* in central Uganda. They advised that the teeth be removed immediately for the child to get relief. They even warned her not to take the child to hospital saying the condition can only be treated with herbs.

"They embarked on an extremely crude way of digging out the supposed false teeth without anaesthesia or sterilised equipment," Nalugwa says.

"I watched in pain and regretted agreeing to the procedure, however, it was too late. I later found out that this condition could have been managed at a hospital," she said.

Do false teeth exist?

Like Nalugwa most people believed that infants who are six months and younger can suffer from false teeth. However, experts say there is no such condition.

Nelson Kalyesubula, a dentist at Jubilee Dental Clinic in Ninda, says false teeth do not exist. He adds that children whose gums are interfered with end up losing tooth buds.

He explains that tooth buds normally appear whitish in children's gums, at an early age.

Kalyesubula explains that some children are born with teeth and these are referred to as natal teeth. "These are normal teeth and they are no cause for alarm. It is not necessary to remove them," he says.

He further explains that some children get neo-natal teeth; which



A doctor extracting a tooth from a child. Experts advise parents to consult medical practitioners for teeth-related issues

appear 30 days after a child is born.

Dr Charles Kasozi, a dentist at Mulago Hospital, notes that normally, when teeth are erupting, the gum tends to swell, causing a lot of

discomfort. Other signs of the process of teeth erupting include diarrhoea, fever and loss of appetite. "When this happens, a parent should consult a dental surgeon," says Kasozi.

"If it is the teeth erupting causing discomfort to your child, the dentist will handle the case and in less than a week the child will be fine," he explains.

He adds that for cases of teeth that parents refer to as false teeth, a dentist will carry out a diagnosis to find out if there is a cyst (swelling) above the area where an erupting tooth is forming.

"When he realises that there is a swelling, he will carry out anaesthesia and a small incision (opening) is made to drain the fluid," he says.

An antibiotic and a painkiller are prescribed and the baby will respond to the treatment in three days.

Dangers of removing such teeth

Dr Kalyesubula says when natal or neo natal teeth are removed, those children go through life with dental gaps.

The canines of such children fail to develop because their tooth buds were mistaken for false teeth and extracted during infancy.

Dr Esther Lukwago, a dentist at Kay Dental, notes that removing natal or neo natal teeth is done using crude methods like bicycle spokes, which puts a child at risk of infection.

"Avoid following other people's advice and always seek help from medical personnel. This keeps your baby safe," she adds.

False teeth just a myth

According to Dr Steven Mukasa at St Vincent Hospital, Nsambya, false teeth are a myth. He says the myth is so well-rooted in society that in the past, children who were born with teeth were considered a curse to the family and community.

"Much as today things have changed a little, some communities still think false teeth exist and whenever a child is born, they check them to ensure that they do not have them," he says.

Who's at risk?

Dr Steven Mukasa of St Vincent Hospital notes that children who are malnourished are at risk of being suspected by their parents of having false teeth.

"What happens is that when a child is not fed, every part of their body wears away, including the gums. When this happens, the gums tend to be reddish or whitish and in the long run, the tooth buds become visible to a human eye," he notes. "Since the child is still young and parents feel it is not yet time for them to start growing teeth, they imagine the whitish gums are false teeth so they devise means of removing them. In the end the teeth at those sites do not grow," he explains.

Caution

Sabrina Kitaka, a lecturer and paediatrician at Makerere College of Health Sciences, notes that parents should take keen notice to tell the different changes in their children as they grow. She notes that oral hygiene in the child is important and should be maintained. Washing the mouth with cotton dipped in salty water every after a meal is sufficient. "However, remember to visit your dentist to discuss your child's oral health."