

DON'T RUSH INTO CONCLUSIONS ABOUT...

By Stella Naligwa

Aisha Nalugwa was excited when she gave birth to a baby girl. She vowed to do her best to ensure her daughter gets the best in life.

Nalugwa breastfed her baby as advised by the doctor and whenever she noticed any changes in the girl's behaviour, she consulted either her mother or qualified medical personnel. However, when the girl made three months, she noticed that her gums were swollen, red and tender. Her child stopped feeding and developed high fever.

Concerned, Nalugwa consulted her mother, who told her the baby had 'false teeth'. She said these are unwanted and needed to be removed to relieve the child. She discouraged her from taking the child to hospital, saying the condition could only be treated using local herbs.

"So, I watched in pain as my mother's friend used a metallic object to dig out the 'false teeth' from the baby without any form of anaesthesia," says Nalugwa. "I regretted why I had not sought advice from trained medical personnel, but it was too late. I consulted a doctor later, who told me that the condition could be treated medically," she said.

False teeth

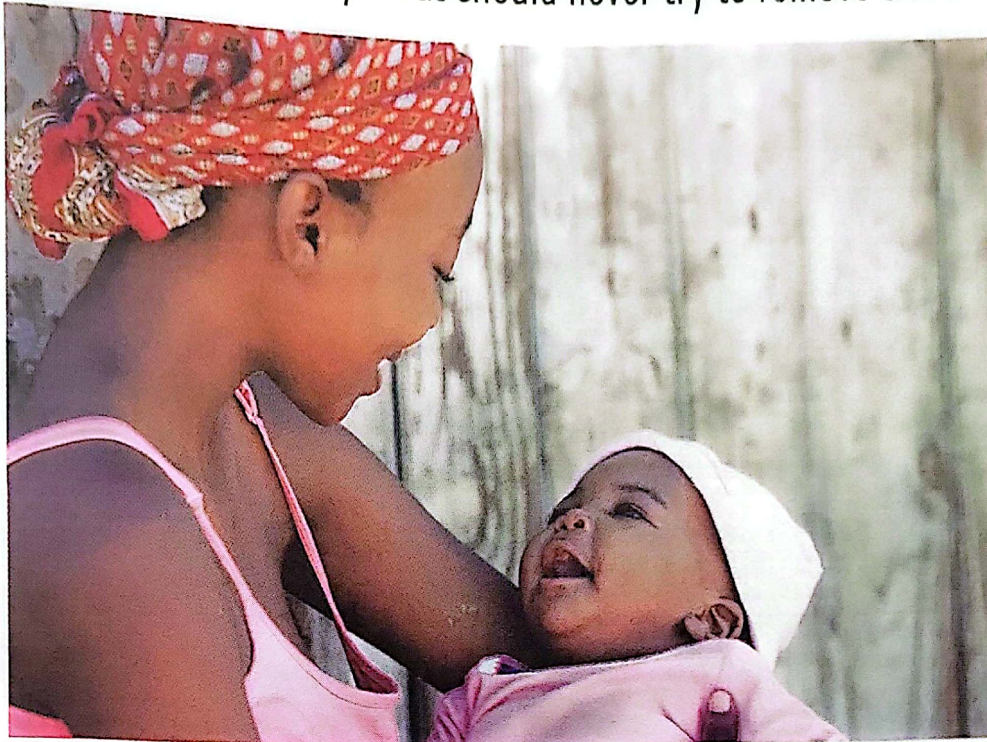
Like Nalugwa, most people believe that infants who are six months and below suffer from this strange disease called *ebinnyo* (false teeth). However, experts say there is no such disease and the earlier parents get to know, the better.

Nelson Kalyesubula, a dentist at Jubilee Dental in Ntinda, Kampala, notes that what people refer to as false teeth are actually tooth buds and advises parents against removing them.

He explains that tooth buds normally appear before the teeth grow, so when parents

'FALSE TEETH'

Parents should seek medical advice to establish whether these are tooth buds or a cyst but should never try to remove them



Tooth buds normally appear before the teeth grow

see something whitish on their children's gums at an early stage, they imagine it is sickness and have them removed.

Kalyesubula explains that some children are born with teeth and these are normally referred to as natal teeth. These are normal teeth and a parent should not worry about them

and removing them is not necessary.

Neo-natal teeth

Kalyesubula further explains that some babies also develop neo-natal teeth, which come 30 days after they are born. These are the ones parents refer to as 'false teeth' and remove them,

but that is wrong.

Kalyesubula adds that children whose natal or neo-natal teeth get removed (especially by crude methods) do not grow them again.

"That is why you find some teenagers and adults with missing teeth in the gaps where their canines are meant to have

grown. Canines normally fail to develop in such children because their parents mistook their tooth buds for false tooth and removed them."

Developing teeth

Dr Charles Kasozi, a dentist at Mulago Hospital, notes that when teeth are erupting in a

CAUTION

Dr Sabrina Kitaka, a paediatrician from Mulago Hospital, notes that parents should take keen observation to tell the different changes in their children as they grow and consult medical personnel in case of any health problems. 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. But also remember it is never too early to visit a dentist to discuss your child's oral condition.

child of whatever age, the gum swells, causing discomfort to the child. Other things such as diarrhoea, fever and loss of appetite the bound to happen in the process.

"When this happens, it is important that a parent consults medical personnel, especially a dental surgeon, to be sure of what she is dealing with," says Kasozi.

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

He adds that for what parents refer to as false teeth, a dentist, might carry out a diagnosis, specially 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 an anaesthesia and a small incision (opening) is done and fluid drained," he notes.

After this, the child will be given antibiotics such as amoxicillin and a painkiller like paracetamol. Within three days, the symptoms will subside.

Frequently asked questions