

# I'm your tooth

By Phyllis Naegeli



<sup>1</sup> Hi, I'm your tooth. Can we talk? I've been asked to represent the rest of your teeth. We are feeling a bit neglected and we need your help. We like to be clean when you show us off with that big, wide smile of yours.



<sup>2</sup> First, let me tell you a little about us. You weren't born with our predecessors, the baby teeth, they developed when you were about six or seven months old. Then, pop, there they were—all ready to chew. You went from strained peas to real food in no time thanks to your twenty primary teeth. Eventually, they loosened and fell out, one at a time, probably about the time you were six or seven years old. Do you remember the tooth fairy? That was fun waking up to a quarter, fifty cents, or even a dollar under your pillow. Ah, the good old days!

<sup>3</sup> Then we came into your life. We are your permanent teeth, all twenty-eight of us. Some people may even have thirty-two depending on those wisdom teeth in the back. Sometimes they come in, and sometimes they cause trouble, you just never know with them. Many times wisdom teeth come in crooked or are sideways and have to be pulled. Some people don't even have them at all!

<sup>4</sup> On a more personal note, I am an incisor, and you have seven more just like me, here in the front of your mouth. We do the biting on those chocolate chip cookies you like so much. Next to us are the canines, four sharp teeth, two on either side. Their job is to tear food; pizza is a good one for them. Behind them are eight premolars and eight to twelve molars, depending on those wisdom teeth. The molars do the majority of the work chewing and grinding up the food that you eat. They do a great job on those crunchy carrots you like so much!

<sup>5</sup> Did you know we not only help you bite and chew but we also help you to talk? That's right. Try to say "tooth" without letting your tongue touch the back of your teeth. It sounds pretty funny doesn't it? Now try saying "factor." Notice how your teeth touch your lips to make the "f" sound. Without us, it would be pretty hard to say a lot of different words. Singing "fa la la la la la la la" at Christmas just wouldn't be the same without us!

<sup>6</sup> Now it's lecture time. We need to be brushed twice a day, everyday. And not just a quick brushing! Brush us for at least two to three minutes and use fluoride toothpaste. There are some great tasting ones out there. Personally, I like wintergreen, but it's up to you. We like a brush with soft bristles, those hard ones scrape off our enamel. We need to be flossed every day too. It's important to floss down under the gums to keep them in good shape too. If they're not appropriately cleaned you could lose me or some of my buddies.

7 Technically speaking, the part of your teeth that you see is called a crown. The crown is covered by enamel, a hard, white, shiny substance that protects the inner parts of a tooth. When taken care of properly, it makes us look good. Right under the enamel is the dentin. It's pretty shy and wants to stay protected by the enamel. It's hard like bone but not as pretty as enamel and it gets embarrassed when it shows through. The dentin likes to do its job of protecting the pulp, the soft insides of your teeth. The pulp contains the nerves and blood vessels and they need to be protected. If this part of the tooth is exposed because of a cavity, bacteria can get in and cause an infection. Under the gum line are the roots. They are covered with a material called cementum which holds your teeth in place inside your mouth.

8 Brushing and flossing protects us against tooth decay. When we aren't brushed correctly we can start to break down and develop cavities that let germs and bacteria inside to the pulp. Left alone, cavities just grow bigger and bigger. Your dentist would have to drill and fill a cavity. Prevention is a much better way to go!

9 A well balanced diet is helpful in keeping teeth healthy. Avoid large amounts of sugary, chewy foods and candy. These stick to us and help to promote tooth decay. Sodas and other sweetened drinks bathe us in sugar, too. It's best to limit these types of foods.

10 Best of all we like to visit the dentist twice a year. We like the one you go to, so let's make sure we get there on a regular basis. The hygienist is nice too. She does a great job of getting rid of plaque that builds up.

11 As permanent teeth, we would like to stay with you throughout your whole life. But if we don't get the right care, it's not going to happen.

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