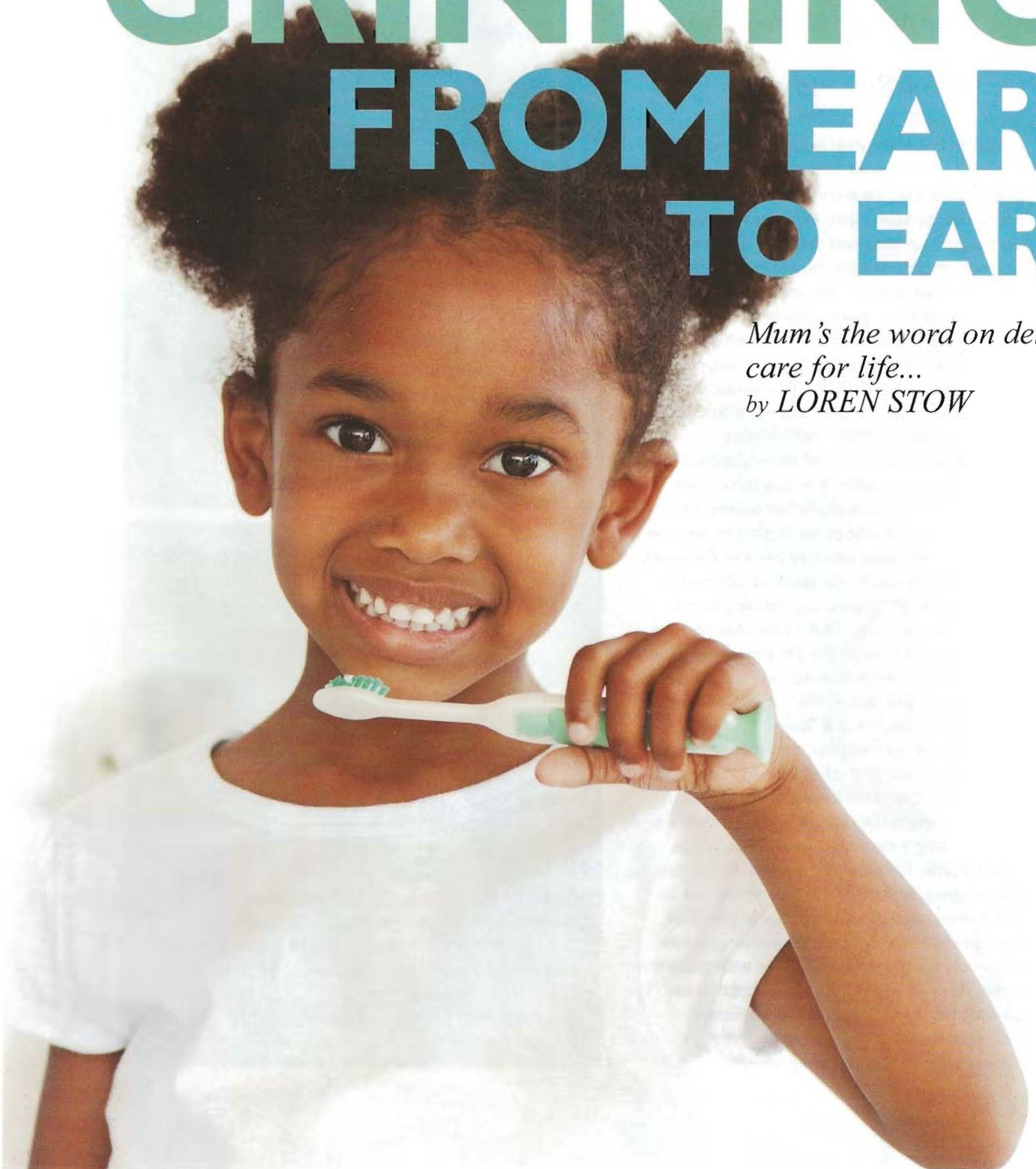


GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR

*Mum's the word on dental
care for life...*
by LOREN STOW



“**d**ental decay before the age of six has recently reached epidemic proportions worldwide,” explains Dr Angela Gilhespie, Johannesburg-based dentist and founder of Teeth For Life, “and there is little, if any, attempt at prevention.” Dr Gilhespie, the self-published author of ‘The ABC’s of Children’s Teeth – A 21st Century Guide for Parents’, explains that mothers are at the forefront of oral healthcare. “Moms control their family’s oral health” she says, “from the initial bacterial colonisation of their children’s mouths, to what they eat and drink, to their oral hygiene and dental visits.” Dr Gilhespie is passionate about prevention as the only solution to this epidemic, and she has shared valuable tips with **Mamas & Papas** on how moms can start out on the right foot when it comes to oral healthcare.

ORAL HEALTH DURING PREGNANCY

“Oral health for the family begins with mom’s oral health,” shares Dr Gilhespie. From the sixth week of pregnancy, teeth start to develop in the growing baby, with permanent teeth making their appearance. The doctor explains that if the mother is deficient in vitamin D, the development of the tooth enamel of the foetus will be compromised, putting children at risk for early tooth decay. High temperatures during pregnancy, as well as thyroid and diabetes during pregnancy, can have a similar negative effect on the baby’s dental development in utero.

In addition, Dr Gilhespie urges that pregnant woman treat pregnancy gingivitis (swollen and bleeding gums) by seeing a dentist or oral hygienist. “Recent research has found a link between pregnant mothers with gum disease and an increased risk for preterm birth and low-weight babies,” she elaborates. It is now confirmed through research that a mother’s mouth bacteria colonises her baby’s mouth after birth, Dr Gilhespie continues, “and parents don’t understand that tooth decay is actually an infectious bacterial disease.” The bottom line is to get your oral health in order before you fall pregnant, or at least during pregnancy, in order to ensure that you give your child the best possible start.

ORAL HEALTHCARE FOR BABIES

“Mouth bacteria thrive from the start, so it’s important to start oral healthcare from day one,” explains Dr Gilhespie. After each main feed, the doctor suggests cleansing baby’s mouth with gauze squares. In terms of

brushes, the doctor explains that a silicon finger brush can be used from the beginning, followed by a regular baby toothbrush once teeth start arriving.

TOOTHPASTE FOR BABIES & CHILDREN

Dr Gilhespie advises against toothpaste containing fluoride for babies and children because they tend to swallow it while brushing. She explains, “This is a major concern because conventional toothpaste contains high levels of fluoride and other chemicals, and excessive swallowing of these chemicals can cause permanent teeth, which are still developing, to have fluorosis.” Fluorosis is a condition that causes an unsightly mottling of the tooth enamel which usually requires cosmetic correction at a later stage. Dentists therefore recommend no fluoride at all under 12 months, and then only under the advice of a dentist up until the age of six. “If toothpaste is used,” Dr Gilhespie continues, “then it’s only a smear. Fluoride is only prescribed for children at a high risk for tooth decay, and then it is under the guidance of a dentist.”



WHAT YOU PUT IN IS WHAT YOU GET OUT

Diet, lifestyle and oral health are intrinsically linked. What you put in is what you’ll get out, so Dr Gilhespie urges parents to avoid bad habits from the start. This includes choosing the right foods, drinks and snacks for your babies and toddlers.



NO – Fruit juices and cool drinks, even when diluted, are not good for a child’s developing teeth, which are particularly vulnerable to attack from the acids found in these drinks. “Water or plain cow’s milk is the safest option for children’s teeth,” explains the doctor.



NO – Fruit, milk and vegetables contain enough natural sugars, so any foods that contain additional sugars should be avoided. Sugar actually feeds mouth bacteria, making the teeth more susceptible to tooth decay, and also lead to abscesses.

“If you do want to give your child a sweet snack, it is best to do so after a meal and then only in small quantities. A sweet is a treat, not a meal.”



NO – Sleeping with a bottle is very bad for children’s teeth and can cause “bottle-rot” which decays teeth. Correct bottle use is important, especially if children use bottles for comfort and to fall asleep. It is important

to use bottles up until a year of age and then move to a sippy cup. “If your child needs soothing, give them a dummy for sleeping instead of a bottle.”



MUM’S THE WORD

The best thing that a parent can do is to practise good dental hygiene themselves by brushing regularly and seeing their dentist for regular check-ups. “Mothers set the example for their children, and parents who are aware of their oral healthcare will naturally be more aware of their children’s oral healthcare, not to mention the importance of food and drink choices within the home,” Dr Gilhespie explains.

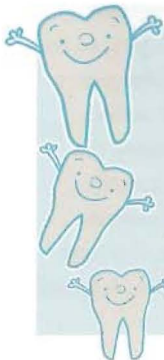


YOUR CHILD’S FIRST DENTAL APPOINTMENT

Finding the right dentist for your child is important, explains the doctor. “Your child’s first dental appointment should coincide with the appearance of their first tooth, and no later than a year of age.” When looking for a dentist, be aware of trying to find a place that is child-friendly, colourful, and where the staff members understand the needs and fears of little children. “Parents need to find a place where preventative care is of utmost importance, because tooth decay and oral disease is totally preventable. Don’t let a toothache or a visible hole be your reason for seeing the dentist!”



For more information, contact Dr Angela Gilhespie on 011 682 3283, email info@teethforlife.co.za or visit www.teethforlife.co.za



XYLITOL – The New Standard for Prevention

Xylitol has profound oral health benefits and research now shows that it should be taken daily from the very start. “Long-term use of xylitol changes the ecology of not only the mouth, but the entire naso-pharynx (throat, tonsils and ears), as it prevents the growth of Streptococcus species,” explains Dr Gilhespie. Regular use of xylitol has been shown to decrease the incidence of ear infections by 40% through reducing the incidence of Streptococcus pneumoniae. It also prevents Streptococcus mutans, the main culprit for tooth decay, from attaching to the tooth’s surface to cause the disease.

To find out more, visit www.teethforlife.co.za 