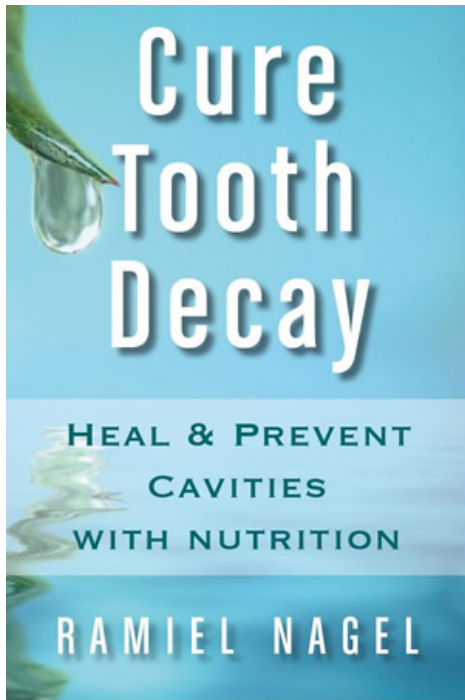


Minimally Invasive Dentistry – How to Reverse Tooth Decay

Reviewed by Rosalind Michahelles



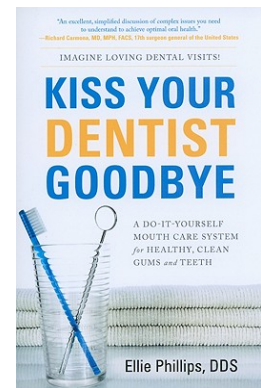
Kiss Your Dentist Goodbye (Ellie Phillips, DDS, Greenleaf, 2010);

Cure Tooth Decay (Ramiel Nagel, Golden Child, 2009)

Kiss Your Dentist Goodbye and *Cure Tooth Decay* are two books singing in the same choir but not quite harmonizing. Both authors believe in minimally invasive dentistry, relying on prevention and on the re-mineralization of teeth. Re-mineralization is the good news! The self-repair of teeth is an alternative to drilling and filling. The authors disagree, however, on several topics: the use of fluoride, the use of xylitol, and whether bacteria cause tooth decay.

Dr. Phillips (*Kiss Your Dentist Goodbye*) argues that acidity encourages tooth decay, acidity that can come from poor diet, reflux, dehydration, and certain medicines, including chemotherapy. The theory is that “wrong” bacteria

thrive on acidity, whereas the “right” bacteria don’t. The bacterial theory naturally leads to the suggestion of cleaning the toothbrush thoroughly between uses. This author questions the usefulness of flossing and recommends a very dilute fluoride rinse, claiming that fluoride is a catalyst in the building of tooth enamel. It should, though, never be swallowed and she regrets the fluoridation of drinking water.



Ramiel Nagel, who is not a dentist, approaches tooth decay from nutrition. He quotes Weston Price, the dentist who circled the globe in the 1930’s and found populations without tooth decay: their common denominator was that none ate a Western diet. What they did eat depended on where they were (Greenland, the Alps, South Sea Islands, Outer Hebrides, etc.) and in all cases included raw food and cooked food and fermented food. Diets such as those would not lead to the kind of acidity Dr. Phillips decries as feeding noxious bacteria.

However, Mr. Nagel doesn’t believe that bacteria are the problem, basing his argument on two facts: (1) that antibiotics or antibacterial rinses don’t stop tooth decay; and (2) that people haven’t evolved with antibodies to tooth decay – which you would expect, if bacteria were the cause.

If not bacteria, then what? Mr. Nagel cites the dentist Melvin Page who claims that tooth decay comes from a distorted ratio of calcium-to-phosphorous in the blood. Those are the principal minerals in teeth and bones. His optimal ratio is 2.5 (Ca) to 1.0 (P), with fluctuations in that leading to tooth decay. In that scenario, a blood test could diagnose a problem and help with prevention.

Now for xylitol – the sugar extracted originally from birch trees and now from other plants, including corn. It tastes and looks like sugar but according to Dr. Phillips it not only spares the teeth but actually helps in re-mineralizing them. As it's now included in various toothpastes and chewing gums, she must not be alone in that persuasion. Apparently streptococcus mutans, the bacteria blamed for caries, hasn't yet figured out how to make use of xylitol. However, if you follow Mr. Nagel's advice, you will eschew xylitol and instead adhere to the so-called Weston Price diet, which is basically a traditional diet without refined grains and sugars. Your body knows very well how to rebuild teeth and take care of many other problems, too, when given the ingredients that we humans evolved consuming: organic fruit and vegetables, field-raised meat (especially organ meat), raw milk and butter, cod liver oil, fermented food like yogurt and sauerkraut, nuts, and grains, and beans that have been soaked before cooking. (The traditional diet varies according to region. Dairy and cod are not universal but what they offer is found elsewhere in other kinds of food.)

My take: we care about our teeth and wonder what we should be doing and not doing. Sugar has long been blamed for tooth decay but is that the whole story? Since 20th century people eating "pre-Westernized" diets (e.g., Esquimaux, Hebridean, Masai, South Sea Islanders) were found to have healthy teeth, it seems clear that we should return to our version of such a diet, which is what the followers of Dr. Weston Price recommend. (See website below for specifics.) Your teeth are made and remade using what you eat and – most exciting of all – the notion that teeth can re-mineralize, i.e., reverse tooth decay. So, look to your diet!

Useful websites:

<http://www.holisticdental.org>

(Holistic Dental Association)

www.wcmidentistry.com

(World congress of Minimally Invasive Dentistry)

<http://www.westonaprice.org/dentistry>

(Weston A. Price Foundation)

Rosalind Michahelles is a Certified Holistic Health Counselor in Cambridge. For questions about this essay or related issues please call 617-491-3239 or visit www.nutrition-matters.info