Myths and Misconceptions about Teething
Content

• Define myths and misconceptions
• Share a few known myths and misconceptions on teething
• Identify aetiology of myths and misconceptions
• Challenge a few beliefs
• Resolving myths and misconceptions
Introduction

• Myths and misconceptions occur in all cultures, all professions, on all subject matters.
• Myths can be defined as stories handed down from olden times containing the early beliefs of a race.
• Misconception is defined as a belief or an idea that is not based on correct information.
What are myths and misconceptions

• **Myths** are stories and feebles. Addressing them is quiet challenging. Why will you want to challenge feebles? Are there inherent dangers in these feebles?

• **Misconception** is based on inaccurate information. This definitely needs to be addressed as action will be based on wrong information with often dear consequences.
Myths associated with teething

• There are myths about teething in various cultures.
• These myths are associated with tooth eruption process, and teeth present in the mouth.
• The following slides will share a few of these myths.
A few myths

• If your baby erupts its first set of teeth before 6 month of age then the mother is going to get pregnant within a year.

• The quality of the breast milk will be affected if mother undergoes any dental treatment while breast feeding.
A few myths

• Children with natal or neonatal teeth will:
  o Become famous soldiers (England)
  o Future conqueror of the world like Napoleon (France and Italy)
  o Are monsters and bearers of misfortune (Africa, China, Poland, India)
Zooming on teething

• Teething is a phenomenon in the life of a child.
• There are variability about the normalcy of this process – a normal physiological process accompanied with grief and pain OR a physiological process that coincides with other physiological mechanisms that predispose to the possibility for grief and pain? Either way, the potential for pain when a tooth erupts is high.
Teething and problems

• Teething is also an English idiom that means troubles or problems encountered in the early stages of an activity. OR a growing pain related to a new programme.

• In the English diction, teething is synonymous with pain/trouble, unpleasantness.
Misconceptions about teething

• Europe - Early teething was associated with higher intelligence, whilst delayed teething signaled later learning difficulties.

• Hippocrates, Homer, Celsus and Aristotle - Primary tooth eruption is a cause of severe illness, including fever, diarrhoea and convulsions.
Misconceptions about teething - 2

• Teething was associated with photophobia, blinking eyes, vomiting, neuralgia, severe head cold, weight loss, toxaemia, tonsillitis, paralysis, cholera, meningitis, tetanus, insanity and even penile discharge.
Remedies for teething problem

• Soranus’s remedy - hare's brain could soothe the pain of teething. This treatment persisted until the 17th century.

• Bracelets and amulets (Aetios of Amida) – made to cure teething pain in the 6th century.

• Dog’s lick, dog’s milk or whisky/rum will soothe pain associated with teething.
Remedies for teething problem - 2

- A charm made from the hairs of the cross of the donkey (Christian Tradition)
- After the mother returns from church, she should breathe three times on the child.
Remedies for teething problem - 3

• Germany - on sighting a child’s first tooth, immediately slap child's face. This will make the teething process painless.
• United States – rubbing the rabbit brain on the gums three or four times a day, was very helpful to teething babies.
• Nigeria - Killing of a cock for the child or baby at the first sighting of an erupting tooth in a child to prevent teething problems.
Remedies for teething problem - 4

• Nigeria - Killing of a cock for the child or baby at the first sighting of an erupting tooth in a child to prevent teething problems.

• Britain - On the tenth day after birth, carrying the baby around the outside of a house three times.
Modern remedies for teething

• Remedies for teething still persist into the 20th century. There are now multiple medicines available to making the teething process smooth:
  o teething powder
  o teething syrups like Pikan
Myths about teething

• Exfoliated teeth needs to be thrown on the roof top and picked by lizards so as to allow the growth of a new set.

• Exfoliated teeth to be kept under the pillow for the tooth fairy to pick and replace with a gift.
Many of you may not know that say ‘bless you’ after someone sneezes is the result of myths that have come to stay and is elegant.
Understanding teething

• Teething is a harmless, normal physiological process that does nothing other than to bring out teeth.
• Some note it is associated with mild gum itching, increased salivation, mild elevation of temperation and possibility for loose stool.
• Associated with multiple physiological processes that makes interpretation difficult.
Physiological processes

- The normal salivary gland development which occurs at about two to three months of age when the salivary glands of infants begin functioning which contributes to constant drooling, which mothers may misinterpret as a sign of teething.
Physiological processes - 2

• Nocturnal awakening occurring around 8-9 months of age when infants develop a sense of object permanence and call out to their parents is another normal developmental event mothers can erroneously assume is a symptom of teething.
Physiological processes - 3

- At approximately six months of age, when the primary teeth are about to erupt, maternal antibodies upon which young children depend begins to decrease while they build up their own antibodies which are not yet sufficient to defend them against infections.
Physiological processes - 4

• Also, child starts to crawl at this age, pick and place unclean objects in their mouths to help itch the gums. This can introduce pathogens and may lead to gastrointestinal disturbances associated increase in body temperature.
Evidence of a pathology

- Teething problems are due to infection or undiagnosed herpetic gingivostomatitis (King et al, 2002).
Factors that promote misconception

• There is a lot of public interest as the controversy remains unresolved.
• Study by various authors show multiple beliefs about teething (Denloye et al, 2005).
Factors that promote misconception -2

• Study by Oziegbe et al (2009) shows those in higher socioeconomic strata less likely to have misconception about teething and less likely to report on teething symptoms. This may be due to better sanitation, hygiene, and nutritional standards.
Is teething truly all misconceptions?

- Oziegbe’s study showed that independent of parents’ belief, there were still reports of signs and symptoms associated with teething. The most frequent of this is fever.
Is teething truly all misconceptions - 2

• Jaber and Cohen (1992) reported a statistically significant increase in temperature ($1^0\text{c}$) beginning three days before tooth eruption, with the highest temperature recorded on the day of eruption.

• Macknin et al (2000) also reported a high frequency of fever as a teething symptom in a prospective study.
Macknin et al (2000) did not report cases of irritability or diarrhea.

Wake et al (2000) who conducted a cohort study found no association between teething, body temperature, or other symptoms including drooling, sleep disturbance, diarrhea, or rashes.
• These prospective longitudinal studies seem to provide the needed evidence for public education.
Summary of evidence

• Mild symptoms previously thought to be associated with teething were found to be temporally associated with teething. However, no symptom cluster could reliably predict the imminent emergence of a tooth Macknin et al (2000).
Summary of evidence - 2

- Wake et al’s (2000) cohort study did not confirm a strong associations between tooth eruption and a range of teething symptoms in children 6 to 30 months old, although the possibility that weak associations may exist.
Summary of evidence - 3

• These findings contrast with strong parent and professional beliefs to the contrary.
• Eruption of the primary dentition is often accompanied by redness, but not swelling, of the gingival tissues (Hulland et al, 2000).
Summary of truths about teething

Teething accompanied by redness of the gums and possibility of slight increase in temperature.
Misconceptions about teething

- Irritability/crying
- Sleeplessness
- Increased salivation/drooling
- Circumoral rash
- Diarrhoea and vomiting “Igbe eyin”
- Fever
- Earache
Normal Infant Development and Common Symptoms

- Salivary Gland Development = Drooling
- Object Permanence = Nocturnal Awakening
- Immature Antibodies and Germs = Diarrhea, Vomiting, Fever
How to address misconceptions

• Simply by educating and providing factual information: ANC clinics, public media, posters, lectures, seminars. Example is the Ife project.
• Evidence show that misconception will reduce with public enlightenments.
• Addressing public misconception on teething will need a strategic public education plan to be developed and evaluated over time.
Need to address misconception

- Associated morbidity and mortality eg the pikan story.
- Misconception perpetuated by trusted health workers and professionals (Bankole et al, 2004).
- Child Associations can develop a programme and devote a period to strategically address misconceptions about teething. Impact can be measured and reported when compared with baseline data. Design as an operational research.
How to address myths

• Myths are more difficult to address.
• They are informed by stories told over the years.
• Personally, where they do no harm, myths should be left alone eg the story of Santa Claus from Iceland and gifts for children on Christmas day.
• People often learn the truths about these myths later in life and choose to drop or further perpetuate them for whatever benefits.
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