



Ancient Teeth/Jaw

Toothaches and attempts to cure them have been around as long as we have. Researchers have discovered evidence of ***tooth drilling*** that took place more than 9000 years ago. It appears that some enterprising dentist-in-training must have put down his spear and picked up a crude dental drill to fix a cavity-ridden molar tooth in a fellow Neolithic man. Although the process was unbelievably precise and only took about a minute it was done ***without anesthesia*** which could not have been fun!

For a long time people believed that cavities were caused by a “***tooth worm***” that burrowed inside the tooth and caused pain by wiggling around. The earliest reference to this tooth worm was in a Sumerian text dated around 5000 BCE. Right up until the 18th century most people, including dental practitioners, believed that tooth worms caused decay and pain.

Some ancient doctors mistook ***tooth nerves*** as tooth worms, and removed them. This was a barbaric version of the present day root canal therapy. The doctors would also take out the entire tooth which present-day dentists try to avoid as the tooth roots are important for the health and strength of the jawbone.

Some curious cures for toothaches have been suggested over the years:

Roman writer Pliny the Elder suggested catching a frog under a full moon, spitting into its mouth, and then telling it to take the toothache away.

Some cultures attempted to cure toothaches with a chanting. In ye ol’ merry England, citizens would steal teeth from corpses to create toothache talismans.

Ancient Egyptians wore magical amulets

Aztecs chewed on hot chilies

Romans tried oral fumigation followed by a hot mouth rinse

Medieval people relied on sorcery

The Talmud recommended drinking sour fruit juice.

Today dentists know that toothaches are caused by decay and bacterial infection. Most severe toothaches can be relieved with a root canal therapy. Dentists can remove the diseased nerve and pulp, and then restore the tooth with a filling such as a porcelain crown. Don't worry; today there is anesthesia and pain medication so no one has to go frog-hunting at the next full moon.