

Health education Involves the provision of information aimed at influencing beliefs, attitudes and behaviour relating to oral and dental health. In its widest sense includes provision of information about access to and appropriate use of health services.

The key messages are: • **Reduce the intake of sugar-containing food and drink**, particularly the frequency of sugar consumption. Avoid between-meal sugar snacks. • **Brush teeth** twice daily with a toothpaste containing fluoride. • **Attend the dentist regularly** • **Do not smoke**.

Health protection Comprises laws, regulations, policies and voluntary codes of practice aimed at preventing disease and enhancing health, e.g. legislation making use of car seat-belts compulsory, thereby reducing the prevalence of maxillofacial injuries due to road traffic accidents.

BARRIERS TO HEALTHY BEHAVIOURS

The principle of health promotion is that by provision of appropriate information and circumstances, beliefs and attitudes of individuals will be affected sufficiently to result in the adoption of behaviour likely to enhance health and diminish the chance of disease.

However, dental disease is heavily influenced by socioeconomic and other constraints that may restrict the choices available (p. 2).

Whilst parents may realize that fresh fruit is preferable to chocolate bars, non-availability or price may preclude its provision. Similarly, sugar-containing foodstuffs are given to children not only when they are hungry but also as a reward or a pacifier.

CHANGING DISEASE LEVELS

Dental disease levels in the UK population have reduced significantly in the last two decades; the 1998 Adult Dental Health Survey demonstrated that the proportion of edentulous adults fell from 30% in 1978 to 13% in 1998. The 2003 national survey of children's oral health showed the mean number of decayed, missing and filled teeth in 15 year olds fell from 93% in 1983 to 49% in 2003. Marked regional variations in the percentage of children affected by tooth decay were however apparent. The average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth (DMFT) at age 12 ranged from 1.0 in England to 1.4 in Wales and 2.7 in Northern Ireland. In contrast to the improvements shown in levels of decay in children's permanent teeth, the mean number of dmft in