There seems to be some controversy about adding fluoride to the water supplies. What is your opinion on the matter?

We are not dentists, so our answers probably should be taken with a pinch of caution. When fluoride is added to city water supplies, it is done in a quantity calculated to one part per million parts of water. This is not a heavy concentration, as many natural springs gush water with much higher concentrations.

The fluoride is deposited, along with calcium and phosphorus, in bone and teeth. If heavy concentrations of fluoride are consumed, bone appears denser on X-rays; although this apparent density does not translate to stronger bones. In teeth, however, resistance to cavities builds with higher fluoride concentrations. Where fluoride has been added to municipal water supplies, dental decay has been shown to decrease in the population—and particularly in the teeth of children.

Large dosages of fluoride—and by that we mean many multiples more than that added to water supplies—may be associated with discoloration of the teeth. Very large doses can cause abnormal bone formation, and other effects.

There are always people who make more of a matter than what should be made. We need to be aware of the harmful effects of high quantities of fluoride, but not alarmed.

Our opinion is that fluoridation, to a concentration of one part per million, is probably a smart thing to do.

My granddaughter’s teeth (the front ones) have rotted down to the gums. I have never seen anything so bad. Do you think she has faulty teeth?

Not likely! One of us used to practice as a pediatrician, and knows this condition well. Her rotting teeth are a result of the child having a constant
supply of sweetened drinks or milk. Additionally, such children often go to bed with a bottle or sippy cup, so the teeth are bathed day and night in sweet liquids. Bacteria love this environment and quickly rot the teeth.

Fortunately, new teeth will come in for small children. However, it is likely that a “sweet tooth,” or craving for sweets, will have been created. Sugar has a very harmful effect on teeth.

While talking about dental cavities, we should mention dried fruits such as dates and raisins that may stick to teeth and promote decay.

In fact, after eating food, children and adults do well to brush their teeth to remove food particles that promote decay.

Oral hygiene requires we brush our teeth daily and after eating. This is another good reason not to eat between meals. The use of dental floss to clean between teeth also helps. While one is brushing one’s teeth, remember to brush the tongue and remove food matter that may coat the back of the tongue and cause bad breath (halitosis). Use a soft toothbrush, and brush from gum down the teeth, rather than scrubbing across the teeth.

I have a tooth that is very sensitive to temperature change. My dentist did an X-ray and said I need a root canal. I’m rather afraid, and want to know what you advise.

A root canal treatment today is virtually painless. Now, we realize that doesn’t mean there is not a lot of pain in the condition that calls for the root canal to be done!

Often an infection around the apex of the tooth is causing severe pain. A root canal treatment permits the drainage of the infection, the killing of the nerve supplying the tooth, and then—once the infection has been controlled—a filling of the root canal.

Although many general dentists perform root canal treatments, special cases should be referred to an endodontist, a dentist who specializes in root canals. A clean, uninfected root canal is, on some occasions, treated at a single sitting, but be prepared for a second or third visit.

We suggest that you follow your dentist’s advice—he or she knows much more about this than we do!

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.