



Chapter 3

Protecting children from tooth decay

– Promoting oral health among schoolchildren

The dental treatment activities introduced in Chapter 2 and those promoting oral health among schoolchildren began at around the same time. Let's look at various activities throughout Japan to instill proper brushing habits among children, focusing on the Mass Toothbrushing Drill For Children.

This training event for elementary school teaching staff had capacity to intensively train 200 people over four days.



A 96% rate of tooth decay among children

Training events for elementary school teaching staff

After 1860, children were the people in Japan most affected by changes in eating habits including higher consumption of warm, soft, sweet foods. By 1910, 96% of Japanese children had cavities, indicative of the spread of severe tooth decay. "At this rate, the country will perish from dental cavities." The urgent crisis led Kobayashi to pour its energy into promoting oral health for children.

First, the company expanded the Lion Lecture Meetings, which started in 1913, to all elementary schools across the country, making it easier for children to understand the importance of brushing their teeth. Recognizing the importance of training educators as well, the company presented oral hygiene workshops in Tokyo for elementary school teachers from around Japan beginning in 1918. In order to encourage participation from all regions, Kobayashi made the extraordinary offer to pay for half of participants' travel costs to Tokyo. As a result, there were always large numbers of teaching staff participating. The workshops were held annually until their cancellation due to the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, and they had a big impact on the subsequent development of school dentistry.

Lion's unique promotional activities ②



Promoting fun toothbrushing habits among children

● Lion Children's Toothpaste attracts children with colorful prizes

At the time, highly effective toothpastes were available only to adults, so Kobayashi formulated an effective agent for infants' growing teeth and developed Lion Children's Toothpaste, with colors and flavors that appealed to children. Designed to encourage children to enjoy developing the toothbrushing habit, the product included prizes such as picture books and bookmarks with each purchase. For the products, the company commissioned artwork from Kiyokata Kaburagi*¹, a master of Japanese painting, and Takeo Takei*², a prolific illustrator of children's magazines, etc. Not only did they raise awareness about toothbrushing; they also helped to educate children and develop them emotionally.

*¹ Kiyokata Kaburagi (1878-1972)

This master of modern Japanese painting, famous for his portraits of beautiful women, was awarded the Order Of Culture in 1954.

*² Takeo Takei (1894-1983)

In "paintings that touch the hearts of children," he created a unique view of the world with a style that skillfully represented what was on a child's mind.

A Taisho-era Toothbrushing Drill, modeled on those in the U.S.A. in the 1910s.



10 years, 20,000 schools, 26 million people

Toothbrushing Drills provided instruction on correct brushing methods.

Toothbrushing Drills that began in 1922 were based on the idea that practice is the best way to teach children how to brush their teeth properly. As the name implies, the drills were conducted like calisthenics. All the children at an elementary school would stand together, toothbrushes in hand, and follow commands to practice brushing their teeth. At the time, there was no standard method for brushing teeth, so the correct method of moving the brush vertically up and down was taught. From 1925, the drills were renamed National School Toothbrushing Drills and expanded nationwide, becoming a regular activity. In 10 years of intensive activity in various regions leading up to 1935, the drills were carried out at around 20,000 elementary schools, and the participation of children reached 26 million. From the elementary schools came such comments as "Children began brushing their teeth voluntarily," "Children developed good personal hygiene in general, even beyond the habit of toothbrushing," and "We used these drills to justify installation of sinks in school where the children can brush their teeth." Such reactions testify to the drills' effectiveness at improving children's oral hygiene.



The Toothbrushing Drills helped develop the brushing habit from a young age.

Unique activities to capture the hearts of children

The Lion Toothpaste Children's Theater Company

From the Taisho era through the early Showa era, Kobayashi developed unique projects to help children understand the importance of brushing their teeth, and implemented a variety of educational activities around the country.

The Lion Toothpaste Children's Theater Company formed in 1924 performed creative plays about the importance of oral hygiene and caries prevention including "The Story of Tooth Land" and "The Lion Dental Revue." After opening at the Tennoji Public Hall in Osaka, the group gave dozens of performances across the country, beginning with Tokyo.

Public recognition of people with healthy teeth

The company also held oral examination events for elementary school children in the Kansai district. 1,500 children were presented with awards for having excellent teeth. These activities attracted such great interest among officials that Tokyo and then other cities around Japan began to hold similar events, organized mainly by dentists.

The First Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Drill was held in 1932 at Hibiya Park Music Hall.



The national government's first oral health promotion

Dental Health Day and dental treatment at schools

While Kobayashi Co. and others were increasing their activities to promote oral health, the government started its own initiatives in 1920. The Ministry of Home Affairs opened the Children's Health Exposition in Tokyo, addressing the three major diseases of the time: tuberculosis, trachoma, and tooth decay. November 5 was thereby designated as Dental Health Day and a campaign was launched to promote cavity prevention. Kobayashi and the Dental Association also supported this campaign by carrying out PR and distributing leaflets as part of grassroots activities. The government also issued the School Dentist Ordinance recommending that each school hire a school dentist to teach the children about cavity prevention and dental maintenance. The national government and public administrations had finally begun to take initiatives in the push for better oral health.

Later, Dental Health Day became June 4, sponsored by the Japan Dental Association with support from the Department of the Interior and the Ministry of Education. Regional administrative organizations also provided support that grew steadily each year. Accordingly, the support of Kobayashi grew, helping to make Dental Health Day a major event. In 1932, the company gave the movement even more momentum by presenting the First Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Drill in Tokyo and Osaka.



Even in wartime, 10,000 children gathered at Korakuen Stadium, Tokyo for the Ninth Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Drills.

Mass Toothbrushing Drills continued even in wartime

For the First Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Drills, around 10,000 children from 30 schools participated in front of the Hibiya Park Music Hall in Tokyo. In Osaka, approximately 15,000 children from 40 schools participated at Tennoji Park. The spectacle of the children, toothbrushes in hand, following instructions and brushing their teeth in unison, had the power of a large-scale sporting event, and the drills were hugely successful. Even when the world became engulfed in the Sino-Japanese war, the Children's Mass Toothbrushing Drills continued each year, as in 1937, the sixth year of the event, when the oral hygiene division of Kobayashi, along with school dentists and teaching staff, began preparing months in advance to mark the tenth annual Dental Health Day. On June 5, 1937, the event in Tokyo's Sumida Park attracted 8,000 children.

Also, 1940, the year before the outbreak of the Pacific War, overlapped with the 50th anniversary of the founding of Kobayashi Co. Ltd., so the drills were held in Nagoya, Shizuoka, Kanazawa, and Kuwana City, in addition to Tokyo. 10,000 schoolchildren participated in the Tokyo event at Korakuen Stadium. However, with the war situation worsening for Japan, the toothbrushing drills were suspended for the next 12 years until the postwar turmoil subsided.

The head office and Tokyo factory were destroyed by fire due to aerial bombing. The month after the war ended, 50 new people were hired and rebuilding began.



Starting again from burnt ruins

Dental hygiene measures from GHQ

On August 15, 1945, the long, disastrous war finally came to its end, after scarring Japan and other Asian countries. By that time, Kobayashi Co. Ltd. had lost the head office and various other offices around the country, as well as many overseas bases. President Kiichi Kobayashi wanted to restore the company to its previous condition as soon as possible by welcoming back his employees, then attempting to restart while restricted by the regulations of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ).

While indirectly ruling Japan, GHQ made efforts to improve Japan's sanitary conditions deteriorated by war, and thereby directed measures to counter cholera and typhus, and promote dental hygiene for children. In response, in 1946 the Ministry of Education organized tours by dentists and nurses to schools in each prefecture. This campaign to examine every child at every school was one of the largest public health initiatives ever in Japan. Very few school dental examinations had occurred during the war, so this initiative under the direction of GHQ revived Japan's oral health promotion activities. During these examinations, topical application of fluoride, a new practice introduced from the United States, was carried out. This played a major role in Japan's adoption of fluoride.



The mobile zoo operated from 1950-51.

Bringing smiles to a rebuilding city

Taking oral health promotion activities to recreation sites

In 1949, three years after the end of the war, Kobayashi Co., Ltd. envisioned the path to recovery and changed its name to Lion Dentifrice Co., Ltd. In this new era, the company was committed to renewing internal and external growth, and resumed its mission to promote oral health.

Although life had stabilized, there were few facilities for amusement and culture. As Cultural Division Director Yoshio Mukai (who became the full-time head of oral health activities) said, "I want to carry out oral health activities that create a life-enriching cultural oasis." For his purposes, he successfully expanded oral health promotions to include events involving movies, concerts, traveling zoos, and children's Sunday school, as well as lecture meetings. The mobile zoo was made up of five colorfully decorated trucks, with a lion, a puma, leopard, bear, monkeys, and birds. It toured all around Japan. The entertaining show captivated audiences with monkey acrobatics, fairy tale readings, singing shows, evening movie screenings and other activities to raise oral hygiene awareness. In addition, the children's Sunday school held lectures by celebrities, movie screenings, etc., with the support and cooperation of local school boards. These were so popular that parents would attend along with their children.



Enthusiastically welcomed by children in an era without television.



The introduction of the Lion Health Car, a mobile clinic

In April 1952, the Lion Health Car, a symbol of the company's postwar oral health activities, was introduced in a ceremony to the cheers and applause of employees at Lion's Tokyo factory. The truck was designed to look like a tube of Lion Toothpaste, and attached to the roof was an animal doll brushing its teeth. The interior was large, at 8.3m long, 2.45m wide, and 3.1m high. Inside, in addition to panels and a projector for displaying oral health information, was everything required for children's dental treatments. The Lion Health Car became widely popular as it regularly visited two elementary or junior high schools each day, providing for lectures, treatments, as well as film screenings, and trips to shops to help promote sales. It kept to a tough schedule up until nighttime, when it was often used for outdoor projection gatherings in public parks. Although the staff were so busy that they often had to eat their lunch in the truck as it traveled bumpy roads, one witness said "the reason we didn't feel it was such a hardship was because of the tremendous welcome we received at the elementary and junior high schools, as well as shops we visited." A total of three Lion Health Cars were produced, and they toured throughout Japan.



The revived Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Training, held at the Gaien Stadium, predecessor to today's National Stadium. The name was changed at the direction of GHQ to use "Training" instead of the military term "Drills".

The long-awaited revival of The Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Drills

The Tenth Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Training

The Lion Dentifrice Co., Ltd. Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Drills, which had not been held since they were suspended in 1941 due to the war, were finally revived in 1953. A loud fanfare signaled the spectacular entrance of 12,000 children marching into Yoyogi's Gaien Stadium, and the stands were filled with about 20,000 more children. Then they all participated in toothbrushing training, brushing in time to a live orchestra, recalling scenes from 13 years before. The "recreation" portion of the program that followed the toothbrushing exercises began with a performance by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department Brass Band, and showcased a flight demonstration by a helicopter from the U.S. Far East Air Force. At a time when entertainment was lacking, it was a memorable event for children. Thereafter, the Schoolchildren's Mass Toothbrushing Training adapted to changing times, and now continues as the annual Schoolchildren's Toothbrushing Tournament.

About 100 years ago, the dental caries rate among children in Japan exceeded 96%. In 2014, the average 12-year-old had just one caries, a significant decrease. Lion's activities promoting oral health, focusing on the Schoolchildren's Toothbrushing Tournament, certainly contributed to this progress.

A pleasant life starts with good everyday habits

The oral health activity of highest priority was to promote proper toothbrushing habits, as developing good habits from a young age was considered to be important for future health.

Good daily habits, including toothbrushing, leads to a healthy, pleasant life, and proposing and establishing such habits are important to Lion's mission. Just as the company applied ingenuity to instill toothbrushing habits in children, it will continue to work hard every day to make lifestyles healthier and more comfortable for people around the world.
