

For Your Protection



Many years ago, aspirin bottles had tops that could be unscrewed by an individual with average motor skills.

Reason No. 8 for saving your teeth ... Actually, this should be Reason No. 2, right after Reason No. 1, which, of course, is eating.

These reasons were conceived a long time ago when the toothpaste people and the floss manufacturers met with the surgeon general to think up compelling reasons for the people to care for their teeth. This was in 1938 when vulcanite was the material of choice for dentures and the specter of an entire nation trying to cope with maroon and pink false teeth was too horrible to contemplate. The "List of Reasons" has remained intact for nearly three decades and, except for the mandatory addition of a "new, improved" ingredient to be added to toothpastes every six months, the concept has proven to be durable.

Sixty years later, we are awash in a giant

wave of consumer protectionism. This began when consumer protection agencies decided the Chevy Corvair was "unsafe at any speed," although it didn't burst into flames nearly as well as the Ford Pinto. Thanks to Ralph Nader, we now have that formidable civilian tank, the Chevy Suburban.

The agency discovered at the same time that consumers were actually using the products they purchased, some of which had the potential to do them mischief. For example, many years ago, aspirin bottles had tops that could be unscrewed by an individual with average motor skills, thus making the acetylsalicylic acid inside readily available to a vulnerable public. The marketing and packaging people moved quickly to protect us from ourselves, calling their

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BLATANT ADVERTISEMENT



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newly packaged products “child proof.” This was a term that appealed to parents until they saw what the new wave of products was really like.

As a result of combining space-age know-how with new chemistry and physics discoveries, all over-the-counter analgesics are impervious to tampering, not only by children, but adults as well, even if they go to fitness classes twice a week and can bench press 400 pounds.

Apparently even bottled water has come under the aegis of the “protect them at any cost” advocates. I buy water in a 2.5 gallon container. In order to get the water to flow, a vent hole has to be punched in the top of the package. This is a container made of the same material from which Kevlar vests are made. You couldn’t puncture it with an armor-piercing anti-tank weapon. It would protect a space shuttle upon atmospheric re-entry.

We are becoming a nation of would-be consumers, baffled and frustrated at every attempt to get at shrink-wrapped and factory-sealed products. It should have been foreseen that, as professionally trained tooth persons, we would become directly involved in this problem.

It is this trend toward anything labeled “For Your Protection” that has occasioned Reason No. 8 for saving teeth. Innocuous enough when applied to toilet lids in motels, the “For Your Protection” label has come to encompass an ever-widening area.

Consumers, not having ready ac-

cess to jackhammers or government-restricted plastique explosives, have resorted to using their teeth to gnaw their way into their purchases. A four-pack of C batteries, for example, can be liberated by a determined gnawer in less than 45 minutes if his occlusion is good. This is why Energizer batteries, as touted by that irritating drum-beating rabbit, are said to last so long — nobody can get at them. Potato chip packages, soy sauce packets, and pre-packaged tomatoes, all fall under the same mantle of protectionism.

One of the supreme tests for oral efficiency is the child’s toy that has a clear plastic covering normally used for bulletproof windows in a celebrity’s limo. This shield is welded permanently to a cardboard backing featuring a Taiwanese translation of the toy’s functions. The backing is not cardboard at all, but a material now in use for lining bank vaults. It would be challenging for the fire department’s jaws of life and impossible for a denture wearer, regardless of how much adhesive he used, to open and present this gift to a grandchild.

There is a group of edentulous consumers dedicated to the return of paper bags as containers for just about everything that isn’t wet. As dentists, we should support these people. Our new motto should be There, but for the grace of God ...

Reason No. 8 (teeth as container openers) should perhaps be assigned a higher priority in our patient education efforts than Reason No. 4 (teeth

for great smiles), which is mainly for younger people during the mating season. If Reason No. 10 (teeth as an ongoing source of dental income) is to remain valid, all preceding reasons need to be vigorously observed. **CDA**