

## Dentist — Guuta'ista

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### GUUTA'ISTAT ALIKANKA. – I AM AFRAID OF DENTISTS.

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Photo: A chair at the KANA dental clinic.

Before contact with the West, Alutiiq people relied on their own resourcefulness for oral health. At that time, cavities were not much of a problem. Without a major source of sugar in the diet, most northern cultures had good dental health. Instead of brushing teeth, one might use a birch twig or a piece of bone to clean the mouth. In the case of a toothache, there were a number of traditional remedies.

Some people in the historic era used snuff. Also known as *iqmik*, this mixture of cottonwood ash and tobacco leaves could be placed on or beside the aching tooth for relief. Another way to treat a toothache was to bite on a thin piece of nettle root and wait for the pain to dissipate. People gathered roots for this purpose in summer or fall when they were long and dried them. Others mashed the root, wet and heated it, and pressed it against the cheek by an infected tooth. If these remedies failed, a poultice of yarrow leaves and flowers could be held against the cheek.

Dentists first visited Alutiiq villages in the American era, although some dentists took advantage of this service as means of research. Native people around the state unknowingly had teeth pulled for studies on human physical variation. Later, traveling dentists served a great need in the villages, providing services many people often lived without. Today on Kodiak, many Alutiiq people visit the dentist at the Kodiak Area Native Association or see itinerant dentists at a local clinic.