



# Oral Hygiene

Oral hygiene is the practice of keeping teeth and gums healthy. With good oral hygiene, the teeth will be clean and the mouth will have a clean and sweet odor. The type of hygiene and oral/dental care children receive, such as exposure to preventive agents like dental sealants and fluoride, along with diet, will mostly determine their dental health throughout their lives.

## How to Promote Oral Health

Your program can help prevent dental illnesses by serving well-balanced nutritious food and by limiting sugary and sticky foods. You will be teaching preschool children dental health, helping them to brush their teeth, and encouraging parents to get regular dental care for their children.

- 1. *Healthy Food for Teeth:*** Low-sugar, fresh fruit and vegetables make a great snack or dessert alternative. Food with high amounts of sugar is clearly linked to tooth decay. Germs in the mouth change the sugar in food to acid, which can eat a cavity in the tooth. Avoid or limit sweet drinks, candy, jelly, jam, cake, cookies, sugared gelatin and sweetened canned fruit.
- 2. *Prevention of Baby Bottle Tooth Decay:*** Baby bottle tooth decay (BBTD) is one form of early childhood tooth decay which can result from the overuse of a baby bottle feeding of milk, formula, juices and soda. Babies should not be put to bed with a bottle at nap time or at night.
- 3. *Brushing Teeth:*** Although it is often difficult, brushing teeth in the child care setting helps children to develop good habits. To brush teeth properly and to prevent the spread of infections from germs found in saliva and blood on toothbrushes:
  - Always supervise children when they are brushing their teeth.
  - Make sure that each child has his/her own toothbrush clearly labeled with their name. Do not allow children to share or borrow toothbrushes.
  - Apply (or have child apply) a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste to a dry toothbrush (about 1/4 to 1/2 the size of a pea for children under 2 years of age). Children should be supervised up to age six when placing toothpaste on their toothbrush.
  - Instruct each child to brush his/her teeth and then spit out the toothpaste.
  - Using a paper cup, each child should rinse his/her mouth out with water.
  - Store each toothbrush so it cannot touch any other toothbrush, and allow it to air dry.
  - Never “disinfect” toothbrushes. If a child uses another child’s toothbrush or if two toothbrushes come in contact, throw them away and give the children new toothbrushes.
  - If a child uses the toothbrush of another child who is known to be ill or to have a chronic bloodborne infection (such as Hepatitis B and C or HIV), parents of the child who used the ill child’s brush should be notified.
  - Replace toothbrushes every three to four months or sooner if bristles have lost their tone.



# Tips for Preventing Oral Disease and Infections

- **Cleaning teeth and gums** is the single most important way to prevent dental and gum disease.
- **Good nutrition**, which is good for the body, is also good for the mouth. The most harmful foods are those containing sugar.
- **Regular dental visits** will ensure early detection and correction of oral/dental problems. If not previously referred by a health care provider, children should get regular dental checkups by a dentist or pediatric dentist after age three.
- **Use of fluoride** reduces tooth decay. Research shows that fluoride reduces cavities by up to 50 percent in children. Toothpaste and drinking water may have fluoride. It is suggested that only children between 6 months and 16 years of age living in non-fluoridated areas use additional fluoride prescribed by a dentist or health care provider.
- **Use of sealants** (plastic coatings applied to teeth by a dental professional) will help prevent tooth decay by creating a physical barrier between the teeth and plaque and food. Since permanent molars are the most at risk for decay, the six-year and 12-year molars need sealants.
- **Using mouth protectors** prevents oral/dental injuries among children involved in recreational activities such as soccer, hockey, football and even bicycling and rollerblading. “Stock” mouth protectors are available in stores, and a better-fitting variety can be custom fitted by your dentist.
- **Avoid frequent exposure to sugary liquids** such as milk (including breast milk) fruit juice and other sweet liquids to help prevent baby bottle tooth decay.
- **Learn how to handle dental emergencies:** You can help a child avoid losing a tooth.
- **Help parents find a dental care provider in their area.**