



# Healthy Living With Head Start

## Tips and Tricks for Oral Health

February is Oral Health Month

### **A healthy smile is a happy smile**

Your child's smile is more important than you may think. Dental decay can cause pain, chronic infection, lost days at school, and low self-esteem. Taking time to start an oral health routine with children will give them the tools they need to keep a beautiful and healthy smile for years to come.

1. **Brush teeth daily.** Use short, gentle strokes to keep the protective enamel clean and safe. Brush at least two times a day for 2 minutes. Use fluoride toothpaste to keep your teeth healthy and strong.
2. **Don't forget the tongue.** Brushing your tongue daily will help keep oral bacteria away.
3. **Floss at least once a day.** Flossing is important for oral health, it will help keep your teeth clean and your mouth cavity free.
4. **Use mouth wash.** Rinsing your mouth with mouthwash can help keep your teeth clean and your breath smelling good. Avoid alcohol-based mouth wash because it may cause dry mouth.
5. **Visit your dentist.** Regular visits to your dentist will help catch any cavities early. Regular cleanings will help keep your smile happy and healthy.



# Getting to Know Your Dentist

Being proactive about dental health is the best way to keep cavities away. Making an appointment for your child as soon as they get their first tooth is a great way to introduce them to the dental office. A child's first experience at the dentist should be a calm and friendly visit to help them develop positive memories at the dentist.

At dental appointments, make sure your child is getting the preventative care they need. Sealants, fluoride treatments, and cleanings go a long way towards keeping your child's smile healthy. If you don't have fluoride in your water, ask your doctor or dentist for a fluoride vitamin and always use fluoride toothpaste for children 2 years of age and older.

Healthy food choices can also help your teeth stay healthy. Eating celery, carrots, and apples can help keep debris out from between your teeth and they have vitamins and minerals to help keep your teeth strong. Drinking water in place of sugary drinks will keep decay away from your healthy smile.

## What's so special about the dentist?

Dentists are special kind of doctor that helps with your family's health care. They help each of their patients stay in good oral health with preventative treatments like cleanings and fluoride treatments. If a person is not in good oral health, the dentist has all the tools to fix it.

Just like your family's doctor, your dentist cares about your general health. Having an office that your family goes to regularly is the best way to make sure you are getting the most out of your dental visit. Take the time to let your dentist know what is going on in your family's life, it could help them provide better care for everyone.



Keep in mind that the dentist can be a scary place for children visiting for the first time. Loud noises, new people, and being in an unfamiliar office can be a lot for a child to adapt to. Talk to your children in a positive manner when explaining the dentist and avoid using words like fear, pain, hurt, or scared.

Once in the office make sure your child feels comfortable with the dentist and watch to make sure the dentist takes a gentle approach with your child. Take time to find the right office for your family. Consider a pediatric dentist, those offices are designed to work with small children and have staff that are experts in keeping your child's smile healthy.



# Dental Q&A

## Frequently asked questions about oral health

### 1. Should I go to the dentist if I'm pregnant?

Yes, it is especially important to go to the dentist regularly when you're pregnant. Pregnancy can cause inflammation in your gums, regular cleanings can help reduce inflammation and make you more comfortable for the next nine months.

### 2. How often should I, or my children, go to the dentist?

Adults and children should go to the dentist every 6 to 12 months for regular cleanings and check ups. It is important to follow your dentist's recommendations when scheduling your next appointment to make sure you keep everyone's teeth in tip-top shape.

### 3. When do I take my child to the dentist for the first time?

A child should go to the dentist as soon as they get their first tooth or when they turn 1 year old, whichever comes first. Getting your child into the dentist early can help reduce anxiety associated with dental visits as they grow older.

### 4. How often should I replace my toothbrush?

Toothbrushes should be replaced every 2 to 3 months and after illnesses like a cold or the flu. Bent bristles are a good sign that it is time for a new toothbrush.

### 4. How much toothpaste should I use?

A good measurement to use is the tip of the person's pinky finger to gage the amount of toothpaste to use. Just remember, if you are giving your child toothpaste, go by the size of their finger, not yours. For children under 3, use just a smear about the size of a grain of rice.



# Making Mealtime Memories

## Peanut Butter Mouth Monsters

Bring some smiles to snack time with this oral health activity. This is a great way to engage children in oral health and to get them thinking about making healthy food choices. Snack time can be a great time to talk about different foods that keep your child's teeth healthy. Enjoy a fun and healthy snack to celebrate oral health month as a family.

### Ingredients

- \* Peanut butter
- \* Sunflower seeds
- \* Apples– any flavor you enjoy
- \* Strawberries or grapes
- \* Icing or sliced grapes for eyes



### Directions

1. Slice strawberries or grapes thinly, length wise.
2. Cut apples into 5-6 slices.
3. Spread peanut butter on one side of each apple slice.
4. Put two slices of apple together, with the peanut butter sides touching each other.
5. Stick a strawberry or grape slice between the apple slices to look like a tongue.
6. Stick the sunflower seeds into apple along the open edge to look like teeth.
7. Use icing, confections, or sliced grapes for the eyes.
8. Enjoy!



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Please contact Amy Losee, Head Start Dental/Nutrition Specialist, with any questions or comments at (607) 433 - 8060

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