



Mealtime Mentoring

March 2009

Snacking and Healthy Teeth

Healthy baby teeth are important for eating, talking, smiling and holding the place for adult teeth.

Encourage Good Eating Habits

Teeth and gums, like the rest of the body, need a well-balanced diet to stay healthy. Following *Canada's Food Guide* is an easy way for children age 2 and older to get the nutrition they need for a healthy body and a healthy mouth.

Calcium is important for building strong teeth. Good sources are milk, cheese, yogurt and fortified soy beverages (fortified soy beverages are not recommended for children under the age of 2 because of inadequate fat needed for growth and development).

The Plaque Chain

Plaque is a sticky film of bacteria that forms on the teeth and gums every day, causing cavities, gum disease and bad breath. The bacteria use the sugars from food and drinks to make acid, which attacks the enamel [outer shell on the tooth] and can cause cavities. The more often “starchy” and “sugary” foods are eaten, the more often acid attacks the tooth.



Sugary Foods Cause Cavities

Sticky, chewy, high-sugar foods can stay on the teeth longer. This prolongs the acid attack on the teeth. Some examples are:

- fruit roll-ups and fruit snacks
- chewy snack bars
- candy
- cookies
- pastries

High sugar drinks such as pop, fruit beverages, slush and iced tea should be limited. Sipping on a sweetened drink from a bottle or sippy cup throughout the day and at naptime can cause cavities.

Tips for Healthy Snacking

- Read nutrition information on food packaging. A food or drink ingredient that ends in “ose” means sugar. Some examples are sucrose, fructose, glucose. Many commercial snack foods contain more than one type of sugar.
- Eat or drink foods or beverages containing sugar with meals. The increased saliva flow dilutes the sugars and helps to wash them away.
- Use Canada's Food Guide as a tool in choosing foods to offer for healthy snacks.

Tips for a Healthy Smile

- Brush teeth, gums and tongue with a child-size, soft-bristled toothbrush every morning and before bedtime. A thorough toothbrushing takes 2-3 minutes. Young children should be supervised when brushing.
- Use a rice-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste for children under age 3 years of age who are at risk of developing tooth decay. Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste for children over 3. Children should be taught to spit out toothpaste.
(Amended June 2012)
- Floss once a day to remove plaque and food particles between teeth and gums. These are areas the toothbrush cannot reach.
- After eating, swish the mouth with water to reduce acids and food particles.
- Do not let the child drink from a bottle or sippy cup filled with a sweetened liquid throughout the day. Once the child has learned how to sip, use a regular cup. Remember to offer water more often.
- The Canadian Dental Association encourages the assessment of infants, by a dentist, within 6 months of the eruption of the first tooth or by one year of age.

Brush Twice a Day – In the Morning and at Bedtime

outside



Angle brush, place half on teeth, half on gums, vibrate side to side

inside



Brush the inside surfaces of the front and the back teeth

chewing surfaces



Vibrate back and forth



Wrap floss around middle fingers (about ½ meter)



Gently guide floss between teeth



Move floss up and down, sliding under gumline, on both adjacent teeth

Referenced from: Canadian Dental Association
For more information call your public health office.

*Helping you provide healthy food and a positive eating environment
in early learning and child care settings.*