Caring for Teeth & Gums

Taking good care of teeth and gums is as essential to good health as eating well, sleeping well and getting plenty of exercise. By brushing and flossing according to the techniques certified by the American Dental Association (ADA), teeth and gums will be free from plaque and bacteria which cause tooth decay, gingivitis and other periodontal diseases. Here is some useful information to share with children regarding the proper care of their teeth and gums.

The Do’s and Don’ts of Oral Health and Hygiene

• DO brush your teeth twice a day, for up to three minutes each time.
• DO use ADA-approved fluoride toothpaste. The fluoride will help prevent tooth decay.
• DO eat plenty of raw fruits and vegetables. The dangerous combination of a high sugar diet and the lack of consistent oral care will lead quickly to tooth decay and cavities.
• DO change your toothbrush every three months.
• DO brush away from your gums.
• DO NOT use hard-bristled brushes that can actually injure your gums. Use soft-bristled brushes with a head shape and size that fits your mouth and that will reach the back teeth easily.
• DO NOT forget to floss daily to help prevent gum disease. Flossing cleans between teeth where toothbrushes cannot reach.
• DO NOT forget to visit your dentist at least twice a year for an oral exam and cleaning.
• DO NOT brush just your front teeth. Be sure to get the ones on the sides and in the back.

Sink Your Teeth Into It

Helping kids establish good oral hygiene habits is essential, yet tricky if you don’t have the right information. The ADA’s website is an excellent resource and even provides animated video clips of the proper way to brush and floss.

Visit www.ada.org.

Tooth Brushing Tips

• The toothbrush head should be at a 45-degree angle with the gums.
• Brush the teeth gently in a circular motion, away from the gums.
• Brush all of the exposed surfaces of each tooth. No cheating to get out of the bathroom faster!
• Make sure to brush your tongue and the roof of your mouth as well.

Tips for Flossing

• Buy floss that is ADA-recommended. Also, look for the type of floss that will be most comfortable and effective for you. There are different types of floss for children as they are learning the skill of flossing.
• Make sure that you tear off enough floss for easy maneuverability; usually about 12-18 inches.
• Position the floss between your teeth while rubbing it in a gentle motion. Be careful not to pull the floss down too hard between your teeth or you can cut the gums and cause bleeding.
• At the gum line, hold the floss in a C shape and gently rub where the gum and the bottom of the tooth meet. After, push the floss against the tooth as you come up and move it away from the gum in gentle up and down motions.
• Follow this same method for each of your teeth and remember to floss the backside of your last tooth.

Did You Know?

We don’t need to use a lot of toothpaste to protect our teeth. Tell kids just to squeeze out the amount the size of a pea every time they brush.

Sources: The American Dental Association online at ada.org/public/topics/cleaning.asp; KidsHealth online at kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/teeth.html; Toothpaste World at toothpasteworld.com/facts.htm