



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Brush Up on Oral Health

July 2014

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Did You Know?

Children and pregnant women who get regular oral health care have:

- Less tooth decay or gum disease
- Fewer dental emergencies
- Better oral health during their lives

Dental Home



For children and pregnant women enrolled in Head Start, having a dental home is as important as having a medical home. In a dental home, oral health providers (dentists and dental hygienists) and health providers (doctors and nurses) work together to identify and provide care for issues that affect the child's or pregnant woman's oral health.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes the features of a dental home. It offers tips for Head Start staff to help parents and pregnant women appreciate, find, and use a dental home. It also includes a healthy snack that can be prepared in the Head Start classroom or at home.

A Dental Home Provides Complete Routine Oral Health Care

A dental home is more than a Head Start participant having an oral examination. Rather, a dental home provides a full range of routine oral health care that includes:

- Consistent, coordinated, culturally competent, and family-focused care that takes into account the strengths and needs of the child or pregnant woman and their families.
- Assessment for oral diseases and conditions.

- Preventive oral health care based on the child's or pregnant woman's risk for developing tooth decay, gum disease, or other oral diseases and conditions.
- Treatment of oral disease and injuries.
- Guidance on growth and development issues that may affect a child's oral health, like teething and sucking a pacifier or fingers.
- Information about caring for the child's or pregnant woman's teeth and gums. For example, dental homes provide information on oral health issues related to morning sickness and how a pregnant woman can avoid passing tooth decay-causing bacteria to her baby.
- Counseling about nutrition, including food choices and eating habits.
- Referrals to oral health specialists, as needed. Dental homes do not usually provide specialty care.
- Referrals to health providers for general health care needs identified in the dental home.

Tips for Helping Parents and Pregnant Women Appreciate, Find, and Use a Dental Home

Below are some tips Head Start staff can use to help parents and pregnant women appreciate, find, and use a dental home.



- **Provide education about the importance of dental homes and good oral health.** Assure pregnant women that it's important and [safe to get oral health care any time during pregnancy](#). Help parents and pregnant women understand that good oral health helps their child be healthy, miss fewer school days, and be better able to learn. Encourage them to take their child for a dental visit by age 1. See the February 2014 issue of [Health Services Newsletter](#) for more information on the importance of a dental home.
- **Use motivational interviewing techniques.** Motivational interviewing is an approach for talking with parents and pregnant women that is supportive, respectful, and inspiring. It can be used to teach and motivate them to set reachable goals to improve oral health. See [Discussing Oral Health with Parents of Children Who Have Dental Cavities](#) for a script to help staff use motivational interviewing techniques to encourage parents to improve their child's oral health.
- **Build problem-solving and self-management skills.** Use role playing of a dental visit to create a positive image of the experience for parents and pregnant women. Also, coach parents on preparing their child for a dental visit. See the March 2014 issue of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) for strategies to prepare children for a dental visit.

- **Offer to help parents and pregnant women navigate the oral health care system.** Work with Head Start case managers, home visitors, and family service coordinators to enroll children and pregnant women who are uninsured into Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or other dental insurance programs. Offer resources to help them find and establish a dental home. See the October 2013 issue of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) for strategies for partnering with oral health providers.

Cook's Corner: Watermelon Stars and Blueberries

Here's a delicious, healthy snack that children can make as a class project or at home with their families.

Ingredients

- 1 small seedless watermelon
- 1 pint blueberries, washed

Directions

1. Cut watermelon into 1 to 1½ inch slices.
2. Use a star-shaped cookie cutter to cut pieces out of the watermelon slices.
3. Put a layer of the watermelon stars into a bowl.
4. Sprinkle the blueberries over the layer of watermelon stars.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 until all the watermelon stars and blueberries have been used.

Safety tips: An adult should slice the watermelon and supervise children's use of the cookie cutter.



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The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to nchinfo@aap.org or call 1-888-227-5125.

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School readiness begins with health!