



Brush Up on Oral Health

September 2016

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Did You Know?

- The first toothbrush was a twig with a frayed end that was used to brush the teeth.
- The modern toothbrush was invented in China and had a bamboo handle and bristles made from the hair on hogs' necks.



Toothbrushing in Head Start

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* is all about toothbrushing in a Head Start classroom. Head Start staff can help children develop positive oral health habits that will last a lifetime. Scheduling time for children to brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste during the program day ensures that children brush their teeth at least once a day.

The issue answers questions about the amount of fluoride toothpaste to use, how to set up a daily toothbrushing routine, and how to clean and store toothbrushes. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Brushing with Fluoride Toothpaste

Daily brushing with fluoride toothpaste is very effective at preventing tooth decay. The [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry](#) and other professional associations recommend that all children brush their teeth using fluoride toothpaste as soon as the first tooth comes into the mouth. The amount of toothpaste to use is based on the child's age. For children under age 3, a smear (the size of a grain of rice) is recommended. For children ages 3 to 6, a pea-size amount is recommended.

Brushing at the Classroom Table

Toothbrushing at the sink makes sense. But it can take time and may make a mess. Also, it can be difficult to supervise more than one child brushing at a time to make sure they are not passing bacteria (germs) from one toothbrush to another or that other children in the classroom are being well supervised. Bacteria can easily spread when children rinse their

brushes under the same stream of water or if they play with their toothbrushes and the brushes touch each other.

A quicker and more structured approach is to have children brush at the classroom table as a group. The Indian Health Service Head Start Program's Classroom [Circle Brushing: Quick Reference Guide](#) offers a simple step-by-step approach for brushing at the classroom table.

The advantages of group brushing at the table are many:

- It provides a calm, systematic way to teach children how to brush.
- It encourages child and teacher interaction.
- It allows teachers to serve as role models by brushing with the children.
- It allows teachers to sit at the children's level where they can better observe and make adjustments to each child's brushing techniques.
- It takes less time when all of the children brush together and is less messy than brushing at the sink.



- It is less likely that children will pass bacteria from one toothbrush to another.
- It provides an opportunity to include math and science concepts.

Cleaning and Storing Toothbrushes

Toothbrushes should be handled carefully to avoid spreading bacteria. Each child should have his or her own toothbrush. Remember to label each toothbrush with the child's name.

The American Dental Association's [Toothbrush Care: Cleaning, Storage, and Replacement](#) recommendations state that toothbrushes should be rinsed with water to clean off anything left on the bristles after brushing. Then the toothbrushes should be stored in an upright position to air dry. Wet toothbrush bristles should not be covered because bacteria can grow on the bristles if they are kept in closed, dark spaces. If several toothbrushes are stored in the same holder, make sure there is enough space between the toothbrushes so that they do not touch each other.

Toothbrushes should not be soaked in bleach water or other disinfecting solutions. There is no need to try to disinfect toothbrushes in dishwashers or microwaves or by using ultraviolet devices. Doing these things may damage toothbrushes.

Cook's Corner: Easy Cheesy Bean Dip

Here is a delicious healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

Ingredients

- 16-ounce can refried beans
- 8 ounces low-fat cream cheese
- 1 cup shredded low-fat cheese such as cheddar, Colby, or Monterey Jack, divided in half



Directions

1. Place the refried beans and cream cheese in a medium-sized microwave-safe bowl.
2. Cover and microwave on high for 3 minutes.
3. Stir the mixture; then cover and microwave on high for another 3 minutes.
4. Add ½ cup of cheese to the mixture and mix well.
5. Sprinkle remaining cheese on top of the bean dip and serve with corn chips or fresh vegetables.

Makes 12–14 servings

Safety Tip: If children are too young to read or follow written directions, they are too young to use a microwave without supervision.

Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call 866-763-6481.

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