



Brush Up on Oral Health

March 2017

- **Primary (Baby) Teeth**
 - **Information About Primary Teeth for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents**
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Did You Know?

- **By the time a child is 2 to 3 years old, she or he usually has all 20 primary teeth.**
- **A child generally does not lose his or her last primary tooth until age 10 to 12.**



Primary (Baby) Teeth

Some parents believe that primary (baby) teeth are less important than permanent teeth because primary teeth are going to “fall out anyway.” However, primary teeth are key to a child’s growth and development. Head Start staff play a vital role in helping parents better understand the importance of these teeth to good oral health and overall health and well being.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* talks about why primary teeth are important and offers information that Head Start staff can share with parents. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Information About Primary Teeth for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents

- **Primary teeth are important.** Primary teeth are key to young children’s health and development in five very important ways. These include:
 - **Maintaining good health.** The health of primary teeth affects children’s overall health and well-being. Untreated tooth decay in primary teeth can lead to infections that can cause fever and discomfort. Infections from abscessed teeth can spread to other areas in the head and neck and lead to pain, severe swelling, and, in rare cases, death. Using antibiotics to treat dental infections may work temporarily. However, infections will always return if tooth decay is not treated.

- **Maintaining good nutrition with proper chewing.** To grow and be strong, children need to eat healthy foods every day. Children with decay in their primary teeth are less likely to eat crunchy foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, that promote good nutrition and a healthy weight. These children are also at risk for developing dietary deficiencies and becoming malnourished.
- **Helping with development of speech.** Missing teeth can interfere with the development of a young child's speech. Young children with missing teeth have difficulty making "th," "la," and other sounds. This can make it hard for others to understand the child. In some cases, the child may need speech therapy to change speech patterns he or she developed because of missing teeth.



- **Maintaining space for permanent teeth.** Primary teeth hold space for permanent teeth developing underneath them in the jaw. This picture of an X-ray shows permanent teeth developing below primary teeth. If primary teeth are lost too early, other teeth move into the space and block the incoming permanent teeth. This can cause crowding.
- **Promoting self-confidence.** Young children can be quick to call attention to others' teeth that are decayed, chipped, or discolored. Children with visible tooth decay tend to avoid smiling, cover their mouth with their hands when they speak, or minimize interaction with others. A healthy smile gives children the self-confidence they need to have positive social experiences.
- **Tooth decay in primary teeth matters.** Children with pain from tooth decay do more poorly in school and have more behavior problems than children with no pain. Untreated tooth decay can also spread from one tooth to another. Children with severe tooth decay may need to receive treatment in a hospital operating room. See the [August 2016](#) issue of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) for more information about oral health and school readiness.
- **Brushing primary teeth with fluoride toothpaste every day promotes good oral health.** As soon as the first tooth appears, parents should begin brushing a baby's tooth with a smear (rice-sized amount) of fluoride toothpaste twice a day. Making this a daily habit lowers the amount of bacteria in the mouth, helps prevent tooth decay, and starts a lifetime of good oral health habits. See the [February 2016](#) issue of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) to learn more about babies' oral health.
- **Having a dental visit by age 1 promotes good oral health.** The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that a child have his or her first dental visit by age 1. A young child's dental visit is simple and quick. The oral health professional examines the child's mouth, identifies potential problems, and explains what changes to expect in the child's mouth as he or she develops and grows. The oral health professional also shows parents how to take care of their child's teeth and may apply fluoride varnish to the child's teeth.

Cook's Corner: Shamrock Chips

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

Ingredients

- 2 to 3 spinach tortillas
- Pinch of salt for each shamrock
- Cooking oil spray
- Low-fat ranch salad dressing



Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375o F.
2. Cut out 7 to 8 shamrocks from each tortilla.
3. Place shamrocks on a cookie sheet and spray lightly with cooking oil.
4. Sprinkle salt across chips.
5. Cook chips for 5 to 6 minutes, checking often after 4 minutes to make sure they do not burn.
6. Serve with low-fat ranch salad dressing.

Makes 7 to 10 servings

Safety Tip: To prevent burns, young children should not use a stove or oven.

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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School readiness begins with health!



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