



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health

# Brush Up on Oral Health



## May 2013

- **Sugar and Children's Health**
- **Sugar and Tooth Decay—Eating Often During the Day Matters**
- **Finding Hidden Sugar**
- **Helping Parents Limit Their Child's Sugar Intake: What Head Start Staff Can Do**
- **Cook's Corner: Recipes for Healthy Snacks**

## Did You Know?

- Sugar added to food makes up more than 13 percent of a young child's diet.
- Family income doesn't make a difference in the amount of food with added sugar that parents give a child.
- Almost two-thirds of foods with added sugar that children eat are eaten at home.

## Sugar and Children's Health

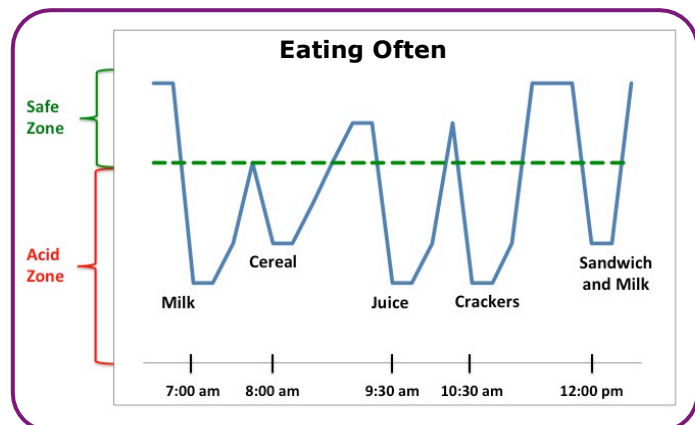
This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* is all about sugar! Children who eat foods that are high in sugar often (for example, every hour) during the day are more likely to develop tooth decay.

Parents and Head Start staff may not know that many of the foods they give children have sugar. They may also not know that eating sugar often during the day can make it more likely that a child will develop tooth decay.



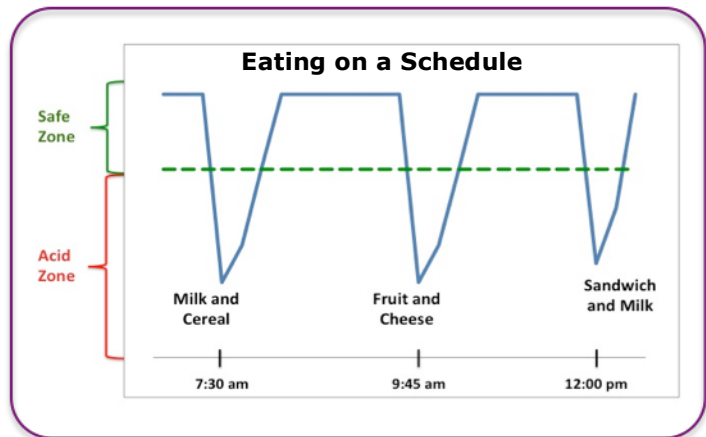
## Sugar and Tooth Decay—Eating Often During the Day Matters

Sugar plays a key role in tooth decay (See [Brush Up on Oral Health newsletter, April 2013](#)). Most foods, like dairy products, fruit, vegetables, grains, and processed and prepared foods, contain sugar.



Bacteria that cause tooth decay breaks down food with sugar to form acid. Each time a person eats food with sugar, acid is in the mouth for 20 to 40 minutes. If a child eats food with sugar often during the day, acid will be in his or her mouth for long periods of time. The first graph (Eating Often) shows a morning where a child is fed often. The blue line below the dotted green line shows that acid is in the child's mouth almost all morning. If a child eats like this often, the child is more likely to develop tooth decay.

Children who are fed scheduled meals and snacks are at lower risk for developing tooth decay than children who are fed often during the day. The second graph (Eating on a Schedule) shows that acid is in the child's mouth for short periods of time.



### Finding Hidden Sugar

Many foods contain added sugar. Sugar in foods can be listed by many different names. The best place to check for sugar is in the ingredients list on the food label. Look for words like:

- Beet sugar
- Brown sugar
- Cane sugar
- Corn sweeteners
- Corn syrup
- Cane juice
- High fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Malt syrup
- Maple syrup
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- White sugar

**Ingredients:** Whole Grain Oats (includes the oat bran) **Sugar**, Modified Corn Starch, **Honey**, **Brown Sugar Syrup**, Salt, Tripotassium Phosphate, Canola and/or Rice Bran Oil, Natural Almond Flavor. Vitamin E (mixed tocopherols) Added to Preserve Freshness.

This ingredient list shows three types of sugar in a granola bar.

### Helping Parents Limit Their Child's Sugar Intake: What Head Start Staff Can Do

Head Start staff can help prevent tooth decay by teaching parents about hidden sugar in food and about feeding and eating habits that can put their child at high risk for developing tooth decay.

- Teach parents how to identify sugars listed on ingredient labels.

- Explain to parents the role sugar plays in the tooth decay process and that how often a child eats foods with sugar can make a big difference.
- Work with parents to set up a schedule for serving meals and snacks at home. Tell parents not to let their child graze on foods with sugar throughout the day (for example, every hour).

### **Cook's Corner: Recipes for Healthy Snacks**

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

#### **Easy Tomato Salsa**

##### **Ingredients**

6 plum tomatoes  
1/2 white or yellow onion  
1/2 cup fresh cilantro  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
Dash of garlic powder or 1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic



Photo credit: Muy Yum/Foter.com

##### **Directions**

1. Chop the tomatoes, onion, and cilantro into small pieces and mix together in a bowl
2. Add the lemon juice and garlic powder or chopped garlic
3. Mix all ingredients together
4. Serve with baked tortilla or corn chips

**Note:** For safety, an adult should chop the ingredients.

##### **Contact Us**

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