



Brush Up on Oral Health

May 2016

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Did You Know?

- Tooth decay is the number one chronic disease among children in the United States.
- As soon as a child's first tooth comes into his or her mouth, tooth decay can occur.
- Tooth decay is a disease that can spread from one person to another and from one tooth to another.



Risky Business: Tooth Decay and Children

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth that use sugar in food to make acid. Acid removes minerals from the outer tooth surface (enamel). Over time, acid breaks the tooth surface down and creates a cavity (hole) in the tooth. See the [April 2013](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* for more information about tooth decay.

Many factors can increase a child's risk for developing tooth decay. Likewise, many factors can lower a child's risk for developing tooth decay. This issue explains why it is important to lower the factors that cause tooth decay and increase the factors that protect teeth from tooth decay. Head Start staff can share this information with parents. This issue also includes a recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home.

Factors That Increase a Child's Risk for Tooth Decay

- **Parent has untreated tooth decay.** Parents with untreated tooth decay have high levels of the bacteria that cause tooth decay in their mouths. Parents can pass these bacteria to their child through saliva-sharing activities. Examples of these activities are cleaning a pacifier by mouth and giving it to a child and sharing forks or spoons.
- **Child enrolled in a public insurance plan.** Children who are enrolled in their state Medicaid or Child's Health Insurance Program may have a difficult time accessing oral health care because some oral health providers refuse to take public insurance.

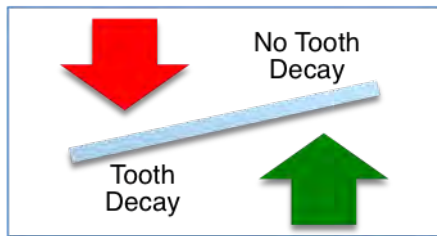
- **Child has frequent between-meal snacks or drinks that contain sugar.** When children snack and/or drink foods or beverages containing natural or added sugar frequently, their teeth are bathed in acid for long periods of time. The acid has time to break tooth surfaces down and cause tooth decay.
- **Child is put to bed with a bottle with liquids that contain natural or added sugar.** When children are put to bed with a bottle or sippy cup containing breast milk, infant formula, or any liquid with natural or added sugar, their teeth are bathed in acid for long periods of time. The acid has time to break tooth surfaces down and cause tooth decay.
- **Child has dental plaque on teeth.** Dental plaque is a film on the surface of a tooth that is a mix of saliva, bacteria, and food. If dental plaque is not removed by brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice a day, it increases the child's risk for developing tooth decay.
- **Child has a medical condition or a disability.** Children with medical conditions, such as asthma, may take medicines that contain sugar or make their mouths dry. Children with disabilities may have oral habits that can wear or break teeth, or they may have soft diets that can lead to more dental plaque on teeth. Having one or more of these issues increases the child's risk for developing tooth decay.
- **Child has had tooth decay in the past.** Once children have had tooth decay, their risk for developing more tooth decay increases. This is true even for children who have fillings to treat earlier tooth decay.
- **Child has early signs of tooth decay.** Chalky white spots along the gum line of the upper front teeth are the beginning of tooth decay.

Factors That Lower a Child's Risk for Tooth Decay

- **Child receives fluoride.** Fluoride puts minerals back into teeth that acid has removed. It also destroys bacteria that cause tooth decay and keeps the bacteria from growing. The three main ways children can receive fluoride are:
 - **Fluoridated water.** Fluoride is added to many community water supplies to protect teeth from tooth decay.
 - **Fluoride toothpaste.** As soon as the first tooth comes in, brushing with the right amount of fluoride toothpaste twice a day helps to protect teeth from tooth decay. See the [September 2014](#) of *Brush Up on Oral Health* for more information on fluoride toothpaste.
 - **Fluoride treatments.** Health staff in medical and dental offices or clinics can put fluoride varnish on a child's teeth as soon as the first tooth comes into the mouth and then every few months afterward.
- **Child has a dental home, a regular source of oral health care.** The teeth of children with a dental home are checked regularly for early signs of tooth decay. These children also receive services to protect teeth from tooth decay and repair early stages of tooth decay.



Tips for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents



Head Start staff can share with parents that preventing tooth decay is a balancing act. The goal is to **lower** as many risk factors as possible and **raise** as many protective factors as possible to help protect the child's teeth from developing tooth decay.

Cooks Corner: Kiwi and Raspberry Flowers

Here's a delicious, healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families. **Makes 4 servings**

Ingredients

- 1 kiwi, peeled
- 4 raspberries or other small round fruit such as blueberries

Directions

1. Cut the kiwi into ½-inch slices.
2. Use a small flower-shaped cookie cutter to cut each kiwi slice.
3. Top each kiwi slice with a raspberry.

Safety tip: An adult should slice ingredients.



Contact Us

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School readiness begins with health!



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